

Lockheed quits Kau spaceport project

□ Gov. Waihee isn't giving up, but others say the plan is dead

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HILO — Lockheed Missiles and Space Co. is withdrawing from the state's efforts to create a spaceport on the Big Island and two top officials associated with the project are leaving, the state announced yesterday.

Leaving are retired Adm. Thomas Hayward, under contract as head of the Hawaii Space Development Authority, and retired Lt. Col. Ken Munechika, executive director of the state Office of Space Industry.

In a separate statement, Gov. John Waihee said he doesn't believe that Lockheed has closed the door on a spaceport in Hawaii.

But friends and foes of the spaceport said there was little likelihood the project would continue, with some saying that it is dead.

In Monday's letter to Waihee, Mel R. Brashears, Lockheed vice president, said, "Based upon the results of our analysis, we have concluded that it would not be feasible for Lockheed to continue in the project."

The letter also said, "... we believe it is appropriate for our company to defer further activi-

Waihee team: 'Not unplugging spaceport'

Star-Bulletin staff

Gov. John Waihee sees Lockheed's announcement as a setback, but not the end of the state spaceport program, said his press secretary, Carolyn Tanaka.

"We're not unplugging the spaceport," she said. "We continue to see the spaceport as the best thing for the future economic well-being of the Big Island and the state."

The Office of Space Industry will continue to be a part of the Department of Business, Economic Development and Tour-

ism, Tanaka said.

Tanaka said she is not aware of another aerospace company that can immediately step in and be a partner in the spaceport project.

"The key is bringing in a private developer. But with the current economic environment, there aren't many takers," she said.

With the downsizing of the U.S. military, the federal government now appears willing to use government launch facilities for commercial payloads, she said.

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Waihee, disappointed by Lockheed's decision, said he took comfort from the use of the word "defer."

"We believe that Lockheed's use of the term 'defer' was not a loose one, but one based on a realization that economic conditions and government policy decisions can shift as quickly as the wind."

Brashears said Lockheed's decision was based on U.S. government policy shifting to upgrading existing launch sites for commercial use rather than building new ones.

"Based on that, I would say it's dead," said Hawaii County Planning Commission member Jay Hanson, a spaceport opponent.

Republican County Councilman Keola Childs of Kona, another critic, called the lack of a major supportive statement from the state "deafening."

"How can it benefit the present governor to push this? It will be left for the next governor," he said.

But Childs said he would proceed with next week's Council review of the draft environmental impact statement for the project

in case the state tries to revive the spaceport.

The Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism, with overall responsibility for the project, said it will continue taking public comment on the impact statement until Nov. 22, and expects to have a final impact statement ready in the spring.

Mayor Stephen Yamashiro said, "Whether this is the death knell, I don't know." But he again criticized the state's handling of the project over the past several years.

Mistakes included delays in writing the impact statement, a change of companies doing the work halfway through, and failure to keep the people of Kau informed, he said.

Even potential friends were lukewarm. Neither the Hawaii Island (Hilo) Chamber of Commerce nor the Kona-Kohala Chamber of Commerce had come out in support of the project.

"It appears the thing is probably dead," said Lani Kahawahi, president of the Hilo chamber.

"It's too bad it wasn't viewed by the residents of this island as a possible economic development."

Kona chamber president Carl Simons said an opinion by his organization would now be moot.

He noted the high unemployment on the Big Island, including Kau, but added, "The chamber is not for growth at any cost."