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Luke's place on F-35 finalist list buoys base support

[Staff Report](#)

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West Valley and state officials are flying high today knowing that Luke Air Force Base has made the short list of military installations in line to train pilots on the new F-35 Joint Strike Fighter.

“This is very good news for all of Arizona as well as for Luke,” said Arizona Attorney General Terry Goddard. “In the weeks ahead, we need to do all we can to make sure the Pentagon is fully aware of Luke’s unsurpassed suitability and the state’s overwhelming support for its selection.”

Luke, which has long been the world’s largest training facility for F-16 pilots, was joined by Eglin Air Force Base in Florida and Holloman Air Force Base in New Mexico on the Pentagon’s short list of potential secondary training bases. Eglin was previously selected as the primary base for the F-35. If it were also chosen as the secondary site, the entire training program would be located there. Some 200 Air Force sites were initially considered in the selection process.

Goddard has been among Luke’s leading advocates for the F-35 assignment. In addition to meeting with senior Air Force and Defense Department officials in Washington on the matter, he filed a lawsuit last year against Maricopa County to force the county to comply with state law and protect the base from encroaching residential development. A Superior Court judge agreed with the state’s position and ordered Maricopa County to stop issuing residential building permits in the high noise and accident potential zones around the base.

Peoria Mayor Bob Barrett said of the news: “Now, more than ever, we must unite behind the base, its people and its mission. The 'Joint Strike Fighter' (F-35) represents the new mission of our airmen and women at Luke. It will replace the F-16 as the most capable combat aircraft in the history of American airpower. You can be assured that Peoria will do everything it can to help Luke transition to this incredibly important mission, thereby ensuring the long term mission viability of Luke Air Force Base.”

El Mirage has been holding off support of the new jet locating at Luke until the noise emanating from the jet can be assessed.

“It’s something El Mirage anticipated, and we continue to have serious concerns about the level of noise,” said El Mirage city spokesperson Stacy Pearson. “But we are encouraged by Senator McCain’s statement that he wants a complete environmental impact study completed to determine how loud it is going to be for residents.” “That process will be critical for the city of El Mirage to determine what their future options are,” she said.

Goddard and Barrett will travel to Washington, D.C., again next week to meet with top Air Force officials to express their support for the selection of Luke.