

Luke AFB named finalist for F-35 fighter

Staff report

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Luke Air Force Base has been chosen a finalist in an Air Force review of potential bases for the new F-35 fighter.

State and local officials have been strongly promoting Luke as a training site for the next-generation joint strike fighter. Currently, Luke is the world's largest training base for F-16 pilots. The F-35 is a replacement for the F-16.

Sen. John McCain said in a statement today that the decision recognizes the capabilities that Luke provides for the F-35 and the strong support in the state for its basing here.

Congressman Trent Franks, a Republican representing Arizona's 2nd District, said he is "very pleased that the Air Force appreciates all that Luke AFB has contributed and continues to offer the Department of Defense. Luke's robust and modern infrastructure provides the Department of Defense with a site that is extremely well-suited to fifth generation fighter tactics and training."

Earlier this month, all 10 members of the Arizona congressional delegation sent a letter to Secretary of the Air Force Michael Donley and Air Force Chief of Staff General Norton Schwartz in which the delegation reiterated Luke's ideal candidacy for the JSF, stating their belief that "Luke AFB is indeed a national asset suitable for current and future missions," Franks stated in the release.

"Since 1941, Luke has produced more than 55,000 graduates from fighter training programs for the U.S. and its allies and is truly 'The Home of the Fighter Pilot,' Franks said.

According to Franks, the Air Force evaluated more than 200 Air Force sites. Once the official announcement is made, the congressman said "the formal environmental impact analysis process will begin, allowing communities around each candidate base to participate and provide input. Based on the results of these efforts, the Air Force expects to announce the JSF preferred locations in late spring 2010."

The other finalists include active training bases Eglin and Holloman. Hill, Mountain Home and Shaw/McEntire complete the line-up of finalists.

Luke Air Force Base employs more than 8,000 people and contributes in excess of \$2 billion annually to Arizona's economy, the board stated in a release.

Luke is the world's largest F-16 training base.

The F-35 will replace the F-16, the Air Force's primary fighter-bomber.

*Glendale
Today*