

CO Lawmakers Want Companies To Reach The Stars

The Associated Press

DENVER (AP) — Hoping to help companies reach for the stars and lure a rapidly expanding industry to Colorado, state lawmakers are trying to promote space tourism by limiting liability for spacecraft launched from Colorado that carry passengers.

State Sen. Mary Hodge, a Democrat from Brighton, said Monday a company wants to build a spaceflight center at the Front Range Airport east of Denver and should be exempt from liability for passengers.

According to the Denver Post (<http://bit.ly/xk58NA>), the airport wants to launch jets that, at 50,000 feet, would fire rocket boosters to give passengers a suborbital adventure. The plan must still be approved by the Federal Aviation Administration.

Under a bill approved unanimously Monday by the Colorado Legislature's Senate Judiciary Committee, spaceflight companies could be sued only for the death or injury of passengers in cases of gross negligence or ignoring dangerous conditions.

Passengers would have to sign an agreement acknowledging the company's limited liability.

The Colorado Trial Lawyers Association opposes general immunity from lawsuits, but agreed to remain neutral on the bill in exchange for an amendment clarifying that the prohibition applied only to spaceflight passengers.

Virgin Galactic, founded by Sir Richard Branson, has already conducted flight tests in the Mojave Desert and the company is taking reservations for flights launched from its Spaceport America in New Mexico. No specific date for the first passenger travel has been set.

Gov. John Hickenlooper supports the Colorado spaceport. The proposal also has the backing of economic-development officials across the state.

The state is already is No. 2 in the nation for space-industry jobs and would like to capitalize on companies that are already building spacecraft in Colorado. It is already home to several major aerospace companies, including Lockheed Martin Space Systems of Littleton and Ball Aerospace & Technologies of Boulder.

Allan Lockheed Jr., son of aviation pioneer Allan Lockheed Sr., told lawmakers Denver could become an international hub for suborbital space travel.

The FAA has issued rules including mandatory training and medical fitness

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evaluations for crew members and preflight testing for companies seeking licenses to take passengers on an out-of-this-world joyride.

Under those rules, space tourists must be informed of the serious risks associated with human space flight, and must undergo basic training.

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