UNITED PERFORMANCE METALS
AN ONI COMPANY

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## Blue Origin, Relativity Space, Stoke Space, and More All Completing Major Upgrades at Cape Canaveral

Numerous upgrades have been observed during NSF's recent flyover, as efforts continue to bring upgraded systems online for commercial launchers, including SpaceX, Blue Origin, Relativity Space, Stoke Space, and ULA, as well as NASA's SLS. Renovations of old launch facilities, new land leases, and other developments have also been seen from the sky, providing a glimpse of new and upcoming upgrades across the entire Space Coast.

Blue Origin continues to break new ground at Exploration Park, located next to the KSC visitor center. Recently, they began raising the first frame and wall segments for what will become the metal forming facility. In just a month and a half, Blue Origin has already completed the entire foundation and is raising the walls as it works toward establishing another manufacturing facility within the site. The Lunar Plant One building is nearly ready to go online at the facility. This area will house and develop the planned Blue Moon lunar landers that Blue Origin is building for NASA's Artemis program. The first prototype of the MK1 Blue Moon lander was believed to have been built off-site at Blue Origin's headquarters in Kent, Washington. This mid-module arrived at Exploration Park on June 26, so work is already progressing to create a lunar lander that will allow humans to land on the Moon. Production of MK1 and MK2 Blue Moon will likely continue in this Lunar Plant One building from now on. Regardless, MK2 will need to be produced near Cape Canaveral because it is too large to transport on public roads. In the yard area, there were also two larger domes and several rings that could be assembled into a test tank. Adjacent to these, a fit check article was visible. One object was missing from inside the 2CAT (Second Stage Cleaning and Testing Facility), where the second stage was not being tested. Since New Glenn is a relatively new vehicle, many upgrades are likely underway on the first and second stages in preparation for its second launch, which will extend the interval between launches. LC-36 is now preparing for the testing of New Glenn's second launch. Both the core stage and the second stage of the rocket are expected to undergo testing to confirm they are ready for the next flight. Since it is a new rocket, testing each component before flight is planned to ensure everything functions properly. LC-36 is versatile because it can test various components of New Glenn at the same pad. Although a new test area was spotted. Cryogenic pipes have been spotted along the test area for the lunar landers before any flights of the lunar missions. This will ensure that the MK1 and MK2 Blue Moon lunar landers are prepared for their missions to the moon.

Over at Exploration Park is a nearly 25-acre plot of land that NASA is subleasing. Originally, Firefly was planned to lease this land, but that no longer appears to be happening. The company leasing it has the code name "Project BEEP". It is possible that this could be an expansion of Blue Origin's facilities, or it could belong to another launcher company, such as Relativity Space or Stoke Space, or possibly another satellite company, since OneWeb is located just across the street. The lease will last for 30 years, with options for future negotiations for renewal, indicating that the company is expected to maintain a long-term presence in Cape Canaveral.

Moving past Exploration Park, NASA has been progressing on the second mobile launcher needed for the SLS Block 1B vehicle. This larger and more powerful version of the SLS will be capable of sending larger and more complex payloads to the Moon. This SLS variant will be over 13 meters taller than the SLS Block 1 and will feature different areas for the swing arms due to the height, as well as numerous other upgrades. The tower has recently been completed to its full height, and two of the six swing arms are already visible on the tower. To continue reading, please click here.

# Air Force to Forgo Tanker Competition, Sole-Source More KC-46s From Boeing

The US Air Force has decided to abandon plans to hold a competition for its next round of aerial refueling tankers and will instead buy up to 75 more KC-46s from Boeing.

"The Air Force is investing in both tanker capacity and capability to enable the Joint Force now and into the future by ensuring an uninterrupted recapitalization of KC-135 aircraft," an Air Force spokesperson said in a statement.

"The Air Force approved an acquisition strategy to extend KC-46A production by up to 75 aircraft. This 'KC-46A Production Extension' program will maintain uninterrupted tanker recapitalization after final delivery under the current contract."

Further details about the contracting strategy, including pricing and contract type, are still being worked out, the spokesperson said.

The Air Force's statement brings to end to more than a year of speculation about its strategy for a "bridge tanker" meant to fill the gap between the KC-46 and its Next Generation Air Refueling System (NGAS), formerly called KC-Z.

Earlier this decade, the Air Force announced its intent to hold a competition for a buy of about 150 tankers that would be modified from existing designs, which in turn set up a showdown between upgraded versions of Boeing's KC-46 and Airbus's A330 Multi Role Tanker Transport. In 2021, Airbus revealed that Lockheed Martin would act as a US prime for the A330, which would be called LMXT in the American market.

However, in 2022, then-Air Force Secretary Frank Kendall hinted that the service could sole-source additional KC-46s from Boeing in lieu of a competition, and the service eventually lowered its anticipated buy to about 75 aircraft. Lockheed dropped out of the competition in 2023, leaving Airbus to offer its A330 MRTT without the backing of an American prime.

A big hint on the Air Force's intended path forward came in the fiscal 2026 budget rollout, when the service announced its plan to max out its current KC-46 contract with Boeing, increasing the program of record from 179 to 188 aircraft.

Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Dave Allvin told Defense One, which was first to report on the Air Force's KC-46s decision, that he was "comfortable" with Boeing's progress on resolving ongoing KC-46 technical deficiencies. "I'm not saying we're totally out of the woods, but I believe we are making good progress clearing those deficiencies, and the aircraft is performing very well operationally," Allvin said over the weekend. Boeing deferred comment to the Air Force. Airbus did not immediately respond to a request for comment. To continue reading, please click here.

# Airbus Begins Equipping A321 Fuselages in China

Airbus will begin equipping fuselages for its Airbus A321 aircraft in China for the first time. The work will be done in partnership with Xi'an Aircraft International (Tianjin) Corporation (XAT), a subsidiary of AVIC Xi'an Aircraft Industry Group Company Ltd, fostering wider collaboration between the two companies.

Airbus has already been equipping fuselages in China for its A320 aircraft since 2021. It is expanding with the addition of the larger and longer-range member of its single-aisle family, deepening its industrial layout in China. The move comes as the EU and China celebrate 50 years of cooperation, and an almost similar timeline between Airbus and China.

Fuselage equipping is concerned with installing and testing several key components onto the front and rear sections of the fuselage before final assembly. As reported by Xinhua, the front and rear fuselage sections of the first A321 to undergo fuselage assembly in China arrived at Tianjin Port earlier this month and were transferred to the Tianjin plant.

Over the next 50 working days, Airbus teams will work closely with the plant to complete various processes, including factory inspection, isolation and bracket installation, as well as fitting electric, drainage, oxygen supply, flight control, and hydraulic systems, among others. The A321 fuselage systems equipping is expected to be completed in October, prior to delivery to the planemaker's Tianjin Final Assembly Line.

The collaboration to add A321 fuselage equipping was officially launched at the China International Aviation and Aerospace Exhibition, also known as Airshow China. Airbus China CEO George Xu said, "This newly launched A321 fuselage equipping project advances our partnership on single-asile aircradt and demonstrates Airbus' commitment to localization."

The cooperation on the A321 builds on the successful cooperation between Airbus and China on the A320. AVIC Xi'an Aircraft Industry Group Company Ltd. has been equipping A320 fuselages since June 2021. The company has become a strategic supplier for the European manufacturer, working on both wing and fuselage equipping operations.

According to the Global Times, XAT has delivered 104 aircraft fuselages to Airbus' A320 assembly line in Tianjin. Meanwhile, the planemaker forecasts over 9,500 new passenger and cargo aircraft being needed in China over the next 20 years, making up 20% of global demand. To continue reading, please click here.

# Affordable Cruise Missiles Move Into the Mainstream

The next U.S. Air Force cruise missile that is expected to enter the arsenal of air-launched weapons will be subsonic, networked and long-range—three common, modern features of the type.

But what distinguishes the proposed Family of Affordable Mass Missiles (FAMM) is the sheer quantity to be delivered and the type of aircraft—namely, Boeing C-17s and Lockheed Martin C-130s—that will launch them.

As proposed, the Air Force would acquire 3,010 FAMM weapons in fiscal 2026 alone, the first year of production. That is equivalent to more than half of the 5,569 Lockheed Martin AGM-158 cruise missiles expected to be acquired over the decades-long life span of the similar—albeit considerably pricier—Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missile (JASSM) program.

"In February of last year, the program didn't exist," says Steve Milano, a munitions industry veteran and senior director for advanced effects at Anduril, one of the two declared competitors for FAMM production. "And here we are looking at fiscal 2026 going to 3,010. . . . That concept is ludicrous, in my mind, from my traditional thinking."

To obtain such quantities, the Air Force is looking outside the traditional defense industrial base. The Anduril Barracuda-500 and the Zone 5 Technologies Rusty Dagger cruise missiles are the finalists to win the first FAMM production contract next year.

The new entrants offer capabilities that are lacking among traditional munition manufacturers, which are struggling to keep up with surging demand for JASSM and other cruise missiles.

"The idea that we could have gone from a design that didn't exist to now being fully able to execute and build 3,000 in a single year is crazy, from my old thinking," Milano says, "but right in [line] with where I've lived for the past 18 months."

Anduril is building the Arsenal-1 munitions plant near Columbus, Ohio. Renderings show a sprawling campus of 10 buildings. To accommodate the Air Force's delivery schedule, Anduril plans to start producing Barracuda-500s at several existing facilities spread across the country, Milano says. Zone 5 Technologies could not be reached for comment.

The FAMM program also defines a new approach to deploying munitions. By introducing the missiles as palletized, air-dropped weapons for the mobility fleet, the Air Force expects to reap two benefits: a dramatic expansion of long-range strike aircraft outside the bomber fleet and a somewhat smoother path to integration. To continue reading, please click here.

# Boeing's Fighter Jet Workers in the St. Louis Area Reject a Contract Offer


Boeing Co. expects more than 3,200 union workers at three St. Louis-area plants that produce U.S. fighter jets to strike after they rejected a proposed contract Sunday that included a 20% wage increase over four years.

The International Machinists and Aerospace Workers union said the vote by District 837 members was overwhelmingly against the proposed contract. The existing contract was to expire at 11:59 p.m. Central time Sunday, but the union said a "cooling off" period would keep a strike from beginning for another week, until Aug. 4.

Union leaders had recommended approving the offer, calling it a "landmark" agreement when it was announced last week. Organizers said then that the offer would improve medical, pension and overtime benefits in addition to pay.

The vote came two days before Boeing planned to announce its second quarter earnings, after saying earlier this month that it had delivered 150 commercial airliners and 36 military aircraft and helicopters during the quarter, up from 130 and 26 during the first quarter. Its stock closed Friday at $233.06 a share, up $1.79.

The union did not say specifically why members rejected the contract, only that it "fell short of addressing the priorities and sacrifices" of the union's workers. Last fall, Boeing offered a general wage increase of 38% over four years to end a 53-day strike by 33,000 aircraft workers producing passenger aircraft.

"Our members are standing together to demand a contract that respects their work and ensures a secure future," the union said in a statement.

Dan Gillan, general manager and senior Boeing executive in St. Louis, said in a statement that the company is "focused on preparing for a strike." He described the proposal as "the richest contract offer" ever presented to the St. Louis union.

"No talks are scheduled with the union," said Gillan, who is also vice president for Boeing Air Dominance, the division for the production of several military jets, including the U.S. Navy's Super Hornet, as well as the Air Force's Red Hawk training aircraft. To continue reading, please click here.

## Supporting the Growing Medical Industry

This year, we have seen a major boom in the medical industry, with new, innovative solutions continuing to arise. UPM has been able to support this evolving market with high quality metals and custom solutions.

There are several factors that can be attributed to the current boom in the medical industry. The primary reason is the health of the older generations, specifically the baby boomer group. These individuals are living longer on average, but do still require knee or hip replacements, spinal surgeries, and/or simple trauma fracture fixations from broken bones. Additionally, there has been a spike in the building of ASC (Ambulatory Service Center) locations, which are smaller, doctor-owned, buildings located in close proximity to hospitals. These service centers perform at a high-volume base and are able to complete simple operations in a much more efficient manner than a traditional hospital would. The final reason we are currently seeing a large boom in the medical field is the advancement of technology like additive AI, which is able to customize implants, reduce the time it takes to conduct surgeries, and produce more exact outcomes.

Over the past several years, our suppliers and medical customers have undergone numerous problems and challenges from labor shortages and long lead times, to panic buying, leading to an overstock situation that we are still dealing with today. UPM has been able to weather these challenges and grow with creative and customized customer centric- strategies that create a true win – win value for all parties.

United Performance Metals has taken several steps to meet the diverse demands of the medical industry. First off, UPM continues adding new mills and products every year to diversify product offerings and keep up with the growing demand of our products. Since 2014, we have strived to add to our portfolio of medical implant and surgical instruments grades and products every year. In these efforts, UPM has added seven new medical-grade products and multiple new mill sources to our general inventory line, as well as several more mill direct to our customer base. Today, the non-titanium portion of our medical business is growing at a much faster rate than the traditional 6-4 and 6-4 ELI implant grades. Additionally, because of the many years of product and mill knowledge, customer service, and experience we have within the medical marketplace, we have become well known as the ultimate problem solvers for our customers as we've helped them navigate the turbulence of supply chain problems that have occurred since 2020. In many ways, UPM has become the trusted partner and one stop shopping source for our customers. Learn more about UPM's medical grade solutions by clicking here.

## Launching Towards Success in the Space Industry

So far, 2025 has been a big year for space, and United Performance Metals has rised to the occasion to drive strategic partnerships and support the evolving material needs of the space sector.

In 2025, we have seen commercial missions to the moon, a range of satellite constellation launches, and space tourism is starting to look more like a business than a science experiment. Another huge game changer in the industry has been reusable rockets, which are becoming more and more reliable. With the pace at which things are moving, it feels like we are hitting a real tipping point in terms of what is possible. Technology is continuing to improve rapidly, meaning things that used to take years now just take months. We have also seen more investments coming in from both private companies and government agencies, and there has been a big shift in how governments and agencies are working with commercial players. Things are more collaborative than ever now, which is helping move projects forward at a faster rate. Together, it feels like the right mix of timing, opportunity, and innovation, making the current environment feel like anything is possible.

UPM's space team moves quickly, thinks creatively, and stays focused on solving problems. The space industry is fast-paced, and a lot of the companies we work with are deep in R&D, which means they often need materials on tight timelines. If we do not have what they need, we do our best to find a substitute that meets the specs and deadline. We are not always able to find a workaround, but more often than not, we do. We work closely with both the big OEMs and their sub-contractor networks to stay flexible, move fast, and offer support wherever we can.

Overall, it is an exciting time to be part of the space industry right now. No two days are the same, which makes things fun and keeps us on our toes. At the end of the day, United Performance Metals is here to help our customers push the boundaries of what is possible, and that is something we are really proud of. Learn more about UPM's space solutions by clicking here.