

National Reconnaissance Office Awards Launch Contract

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The National Reconnaissance Office awarded Lockheed Martin a service contract to launch a classified payload aboard an Atlas IIIA rocket at Cape Canaveral Air Station, Fla.

"It's the first time we've done a head-to-head competition," said Brig. Gen. Mitch Mitchell, director of the NRO's office of space launch. "I'm very excited about being able to save both time and money using this new way of doing business."

This was the first commercial bidding competition for NRO launch services and the entire competition was completed in less than 120 days. The NRO, working with the Air Force's Space and Missile Systems Center at Los Angeles AFB, Calif., used a unique acquisition strategy that parallels the commercial launch industry. This resulted in a fixed-price service contract versus buying the actual booster which provided significant savings for the government.

Another unique feature of the contract is that, while the actual launch date will be selected based on the NRO's operational requirements, Lockheed Martin has to be able to launch within 120 days of notification. Launches are usually scheduled months, or even years in advance.

The Atlas IIIA is built at Lockheed Martin Astronautics' facilities in Denver, Colo. and is capable of lifting payloads weighing up to 9,200 pounds to a geostationary transfer orbit.