West Central Indiana Defense Network Announces 2027 Advocacy Priorities

WEST CENTRAL INDIANA — Following the opening of the Midwest UAS Test Site of Indiana at the Terre Haute Regional Airport, the West Central Indiana Defense Network (WCIDN) is looking ahead to 2027 with a set of advocacy priorities aimed at strengthening the region's defense assets, attracting new investment and positioning West Central Indiana for future military and aviation opportunities.

The Midwest UAS Test Site officially opened for flight testing on October 29 with a ribbon-cutting ceremony and live drone demonstration at the Terre Haute Regional Airport. The event brought together Governor Mike Braun, U.S. Senator Todd Young, U.S. Rep. Mark Messmer, Indiana Economic Development Corporation President Mitch Frazier and state and industry leaders to recognize a significant milestone for the region.

For West Central Indiana, the opening represents years of collaboration and advocacy to connect the region's defense, aviation and workforce assets.

Launched by the Terre Haute Chamber of Commerce in 2018, the WCIDN brings together the 181st Intelligence Wing, Terre Haute Regional Airport, West Central Indiana Partnership, local government, higher education and business and community leaders across Clay, Parke, Sullivan, Vermillion and Vigo counties. The Network works to strengthen the region's position for defense initiatives, advocate for military priorities, develop the talent pipeline and attract defense-related employers and investment.

"The opening of the Midwest UAS Test Site demonstrates what is possible when our region's assets and leaders work together toward a shared vision," said Kristin Craig, President/CEO of the Terre Haute Chamber of Commerce and West Central Indiana Partnership. "We have spent years building relationships, advocating for our military and aviation assets, and positioning West Central Indiana for opportunities like this. Our 2027 advocacy priorities build on that momentum and focus on ensuring our region is prepared for what comes next."

The WCIDN has identified three primary priorities for 2027:

1. Protect and Modernize the 181st Intelligence Wing's Core Mission

As the Air Force increasingly incorporates artificial intelligence, drones and satellite capabilities into its operations, the WCIDN is advocating for Terre Haute to remain a key location for the next generation of Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) missions. Efforts will focus on modernizing the 181st's mission, protecting existing jobs and ensuring future operations remain in Terre Haute.

Supporting this effort is the proposed $18.39 million Terre Haute Utility Corridor, which would extend water, sewer and electric service along the airport's eastern perimeter. A $16.718 million construction grant request through the 2026 Defense Community Infrastructure Program (DCIP) is being pursued.

2. Attract Drone and Aircraft Testing Jobs to Terre Haute

With its long runway, available airspace and room for expansion, Terre Haute is well-positioned to pursue additional Air Force drone and aircraft testing, basing and maintenance operations.

The WCIDN will advocate for funding to study runway, land and airspace capacity and work with Indiana's congressional delegation to secure necessary facility improvements. An additional priority is modernization of the Terre Haute Air Traffic Control Tower, originally built in 1952. Funding needs include $650,000 for an initial study, with future improvement and replacement costs estimated at $2.5 million and $15 million, respectively.

3. Position Terre Haute as a Backup National Defense Coordination Center

The emerging Golden Dome homeland missile defense system presents another opportunity for West Central Indiana. The WCIDN aims to position Terre Haute for consideration as a potential backup national defense coordination center in the event of a disaster or national security emergency.

The region's central location, established intelligence workforce and digital infrastructure provide a foundation for pursuing this opportunity and engaging with federal leaders as future Golden Dome planning develops.

Building on Regional Momentum

The WCIDN's 2027 advocacy priorities reflect a broader commitment to long-term regional growth. Investments in defense, infrastructure, education, workforce development, healthcare and economic development are interconnected and essential

to attracting new opportunities, retaining talent and strengthening communities throughout West Central Indiana.

"The Midwest UAS Test Site is an important step forward, but it is not the finish line," Craig said. "We see significant opportunities ahead for our region, and we will continue working together to make sure West Central Indiana has a seat at the table as Indiana and the nation invest in the future of defense and aviation."

About the West Central Indiana Defense Network

Launched by the Terre Haute Chamber of Commerce in 2018, the West Central Indiana Defense Network unites business, government, education and community leaders across Clay, Parke, Sullivan, Vermillion and Vigo counties. The Network works to strengthen the region's defense assets, advocate for military and defense priorities, support workforce development and position West Central Indiana to attract defense-related investment, employers and talent.

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