

Padgett visits Heath aerospace center

By MARK SZAKONYI
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HEATH — On Tuesday afternoon, State Sen. Joy Padgett toured the Central Ohio Aerospace and Technology Center, also known as The Base.

The candidate in Thursday's 18th Congressional District Republican primary learned how contractors helped maintain some of the U.S. Air Force's most advanced planes and weapons.

"I was truly overwhelmed," Padgett said. "Through this presentation, I understand what is going on here has worldwide impact."

On her first visit to The Base, Padgett was briefed by representatives from Bionetics Corporation, The Boeing Company and the Heath-Newark-Licking County Port Authority.

Bionetics Corporation, which operates the Air Force Primary Standards Laboratory, helps calibrate equipment found on Air Force planes and weapons, said Ben Fullen, AFPSL program manager.

Fullen said technicians calibrate the heat-seeker mechanisms on AIM-9 Sidewinder missiles.

"When they put that heat-seeker head on an AIM-9 missile and it is fired, it will take



State Senator Joy Padgett gets an overview and tour of the Central Ohio Aerospace and Technology Center in Heath on Tuesday afternoon. (Morgan Wonorski, *The Advocate*)

out the weapon on the ground instead of that Afghan wedding party over on the hilltop," Fullen said.

He said technicians also help balance of the B-2 Bomber, which is very sensitive due the amount of weight it carries.

The Boeing branch of The Base tests and calibrates the guidance and navigational systems of various Air Force planes, said Hank FitzGerald, a business development marketing representative.

Some of planes include the F-16 Fighting Falcon and the

B-52 Stratofortress.

On Aug. 29, Boeing officials unveiled a new facility designed to calibrate radar detectors mounted on military surveillance aircraft.

Padgett said she visited The Base because she wanted to better understand the vital businesses in her district.

She said, like many other people, she was not aware of the extent of The Base's impact on the community and its economy.

Padgett said she realized there were some things on

The Base that she wouldn't be able to see during her first tour.

"Sometimes we don't need to know all those things. That is what makes America safer," she said.

The Advocate was not permitted on the tour.

Padgett said she wrote letters in support of the privatization of The Base, which occurred in 1996, and will continue to support the facility.

The Base was closed by the Air Force in 1993. The facility's metrology labs and repair depot were opened in 1996 under the management of private contractors. It was the Air Force's first privatization of facilities.

The facility, which employs more than 900 people, hosts 20 employers, including Honeywell, BAE Systems and Raytheon.

The Base is Heath's largest taxpayer and paid more than \$1 million in taxes in 2005, the Port Authority's Rick Platt said.

Platt said the facility had an estimated \$200 million annual impact on the regional economy.

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