

# Boeing donates \$50 million to Virginia Tech University's "Innovation Campus"

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23 May 2021

On May 4, the aerospace manufacturer Boeing announced it will donate \$50 million to Virginia Tech to help launch the university's new Innovation Campus located in Alexandria, Virginia, just outside Washington D.C. The donation is the largest in the university's history, and will support scholarships and financial aid, faculty hiring, as well as programs aimed at preparing students for undergraduate course study in tech-focused and computer science programs.

The website for the Innovation Campus describes the gift as a "multiyear commitment" from Boeing to "jump-start Virginia Tech's effort to create the most diverse graduate technology campus in the United States." Located alongside Amazon's HQ2, the Pentagon, and industry-related academic research centers such as George Mason University's Institute for Digital Innovation, Virginia Tech's generously funded Innovation Campus will become a major locus for the state-military-intelligence apparatus in Northern Virginia.

In a statement announcing the donation, Virginia Tech President Tim Sands said, "We are extraordinarily grateful to Boeing for this extraordinarily generous show of support." Sands called the corporate gift "a milestone moment in our university's history." He enthused that the corporate donation "will propel our work to help establish the greater Washington, D.C. area as the world's next major tech hub."

Virginia Tech is set to begin construction on its \$1 billion Innovation Campus later this year, with the first building opening in 2024. Eventually, the goal for the Innovation Campus is to have close to 1,000 students in master's or doctoral level programs. Once completed, the Innovation Campus will be the focal point of a 65-acre area, just across the Potomac River from Washington, serving as an "innovation district" with

labs, academic spaces and office space for startup and corporate partners.

Boeing, a commercial airplane maker and defense contractor, has spent much of the past two years seeking to rehabilitate its image in the wake of the fatal crashes involving its 737 MAX. Despite the criminality of Boeing's executives and US regulators, the aerospace giant received the legal equivalent of a slap on the wrist.

The aerospace corporation is just one of several major companies investing in tech talent in the Washington region. Amazon, which is building its second corporate headquarters in Alexandria, also has connections to the future Innovation Campus. In wooing the company during its HQ2 competition of 2018-19, Virginia agreed to invest millions of dollars in the Innovation Campus as part of its larger \$750 million sweetheart deal with the online retailer.

Furthermore, in 2019, the Commonwealth of Virginia announced it will invest a total of \$961.5 million over two decades in computer science and STEM programs at 11 of the state's universities through the Tech Talent Investment Program. The goal of this program is to produce an additional 31,000 graduates in technology-focused fields over 20 years.

These university-level programs at the undergraduate-through-postdoctoral levels complement initiatives by corporations to fund childhood education in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) fields. Amazon, for instance, helps fund computer science education and scholarships through its Future Engineer program.

Likewise, the Innovation Campus, Virginia Tech and other universities in the state will engage not only in advanced research but also in STEM education and outreach at the level of primary and secondary

education, which will be partly supported by Boeing's donation.

In its statement, Virginia Tech itself said the Innovation Campus in Alexandria will not only be a large innovation district but serve as "a nexus of government, industry, and research." In other words, Boeing's gift serves to align further the corporate world with the US military and intelligence agencies.

This entrenched alignment of corporate America and the interests of US imperialism was emphasized by Senator Mark Warner (Democrat from Virginia), himself a former venture capitalist, at an announcement ceremony attended by university officials. "The US must maintain international leadership in advancing technology, and talent is our most critical resource," the senator declared.

Warner continued, "We are seeing in China an emerging competitive threat. This is one of the few remaining issues where there is wide bipartisan agreement. ... The competition of the 21st century will be military, but even more, technology-based." Warner also said developing a diverse "pipeline" of tech workers was "the right moral thing to do" but would also provide an optimal "return on investment."

In 2015, a report in *Vice* determined Virginia Tech, along with GMU and Northern Virginia Community College, were among the 20 most militarized college campuses in the US. The further integration of companies, universities, and government agencies through so-called "STEM talent pipelines," as Calhoun called them, only serves to subordinate the possibilities of science, engineering and technology to the requirements of war and the surveillance state.

In addition to the state and military implications of Boeing's investments in Northern Virginia, the corporation also sought to dress up its alliance with Washington in the language of "inclusion" and "diversity," signaling an appeal to middle-class advocates of racial and gender-based identity politics.

Speaking on the donation, Boeing CEO Ed Calhoun stated, "Virginia Tech has a bold and unique vision to unlock the power of diversity to solve the world's most pressing problems through technology, and we're proud to help make that vision a reality." Calhoun continued, "Boeing is dedicated to advancing equity and inclusion, both within our company and in our communities, and we look forward to partnering with

Virginia Tech to build a robust and diverse STEM talent pipeline to drive the future of aerospace."

Boeing's use of such language in announcing its donation to the Innovation Campus becomes further evidence of the ruling class' increasing reliance on identity politics and racialism to silence objections as it seeks to impose its militaristic policies on the population and suppress working class social opposition. A struggle on the basis of the international working class, regardless of gender or race, is the only way technology can be secured as a tool to improve the lives of billions of people around the world.



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