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## 'A defining moment for Tulsa'

City earns federal 'Tech Hub' designation

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**T**he federal government has named Tulsa a "Tech Hub" — a designation that opens the door to up to \$75 million in federal funding for a local consortium that's working to establish the region as a global leader in advanced autonomous technologies.

Tulsa was one of 31 Tech Hubs selected by the U.S. Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration as part of a \$500 million investment in strengthening the country's economic and national security.

The Tulsa Hub for Equitable & Trustworthy Autonomy, or THETA, will focus its work on such technologies as unmanned aerial systems, drones, cybersecurity and generative artificial intelligence.

Monday's announcement was made by the Tulsa Innovation Labs in a press release. Tulsa Innovation Labs and other local partners are leading the THETA initiative.

"The autonomous systems revolution is upon us, and it is evident through this distinction from the EDA that the Greater Tulsa Region is uniquely positioned to lead innovation in these technologies, which are critical to our country," said Jennifer Hankins, managing director of Tulsa Innovation Labs. "The Tech Hubs designation is also an important validation of TIL's tech-led economic development strategy for the region, 'Tulsa's Tech Niche.'

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"This moment affirms Tulsa's position as a nationwide leader in uncrewed aerial systems, cybersecurity, advanced manufacturing and other complementary industries."

The \$75 million in federal funding for which Tulsa is eligible to apply is intended to be used to implement its proposal.

According to the press release, THETA will leverage the funding to transform the Tulsa region "into the world's leading source of innovations and talent in autonomous systems, expanding equitable economic opportunities across the Tulsa region, ensuring all Tulsans are able to participate in the region's resurgence."

What that could mean in terms of economic development and jobs is significant. Tulsa hopes to secure \$4 billion of the \$1.36 trillion global autonomous systems market, according to the press

release, with the goal of creating nearly 200,000 new jobs in the next 10 years.

In terms of equity, Tulsa could add as many as 66,000 women and nearly 40,000 Black, Latino and Native American workers to the local autonomous technologies industry.

"The Black Tech Street vision to rebirth Black Wall Street into a premiere Black Innovation Economy is strongly reflected and represented in this THETA proposal," said Tyrance Billingsley II, executive director of Black Tech Street. "By centering Black Tulsans and the legacy of the historic Greenwood District within this effort, we are able to further this mission of catalyzing Black wealth creation in our region and across the country."

The consortium behind the Tulsa Hub for Equitable & Trustworthy Autonomy proposal is made up of 50 public and private-sector partners.

Among them is the George Kaiser Family Foundation, which led the effort to establish Tulsa Innovation Labs.

"We believe this designation is a defining moment for Tulsa," said Ken Levit, executive director of GKFF. "The deliberative and collaborative work of Tulsa's private and public sector partners in recent years is opening up new frontiers for all Tulsans.

"We are aspiring to build a vibrant, energetic and inclusive economy in Tulsa that is a model for this nation. This designation of Tulsa as a Tech Hub tells the world that something important is happening here."

The Tech Hubs program was authorized as part of the 2022 bipartisan CHIPS and Science Act.

In a press release issued by the EDA, Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo said it is part of President Biden's effort to "out-innovate and out-compete the rest of the world."

"Our Tech Hubs Program is fundamental to that mission and will supercharge innovation across the nation by spurring cutting-edge technological investments and creating 21st century job opportunities in people's backyards," Raimondo said. "Each of these consortia will help us ensure the industries of the future—and their good-paying jobs—start, grow, and remain in the United States."