

COLORADO

Romer sees virtual university as low-cost alternative

Associated Press

A virtual university concept outlined by the Western Governors Association could result in a high-quality, cost-efficient program that would provide alternative access to higher education, Colorado Gov. Roy Romer said Tuesday.

The Western Governors Association meeting in Washington, D.C., released a work plan for developing the virtual university Tuesday.

Educational Management

Group, a unit of Simon & Schuster, has made a substantial grant to begin the design work, it was announced. Simon & Schuster is the world's largest educational publisher.

"Governors are looking at a regional virtual university to create incentives to expand these learning opportunities in ways most beneficial to students and employers," said Gov. Ben Nelson of Nebraska, WGA chairman.

Romer and Utah Gov. Mike

Leavitt are lead governors for the initiative.

"It will give us a way to certify the learning people acquire outside of traditional, campus-based programs," Romer said. "This will not only provide alternative access for those who might not have the opportunity to attend college, but will also open up the system to much-needed competition."

Such a virtual university could result in delivery of high-quality, cost-efficient, flexible and accountable education programs,

Romer said.

"There was a time when if you wanted a college education, you went to a college campus because that's where the professors and information were, but technology is changing all that," Leavitt said. "Education no longer has to be bound by place. In the Knowledge Age, the knowledge will go where the people are."

According to the WGA, the virtual university would play three primary roles:

■ Expand the marketplace for

a student's demonstrated competence by assessing and certifying competencies and learning acquired through the use of advanced technology;

■ Foster interstate and public-private cooperation in the development of instructional materials, courseware and programs utilizing advanced technology;

■ Assist in the removal of barriers — statutes, policies and administrative rules that impede the free function of these markets.