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News Brief - 6/24/96

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Western Governors University Implementation Plan Approved

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OMAHA -- Western Governors today approved what was described as a "revolutionary" plan for establishing a Western Governors University which would use advanced information technology to expand access to higher education across institutional and state lines and provide mechanisms for assessing what students learn.

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Ten governors present at the Western Governors' Association Annual Meeting in Omaha, NE, signed a Memorandum of Understanding that would allow the initiative to go forward. Last December, they created a design team to develop the implementation plan.

Governors Roy Romer of Colorado and Mike Leavitt of Utah are lead governors for the effort.

"This is a big idea. The Western Governors University will give students greater access and choice in higher education," Romer said. "WGU is based on two cutting-edge concepts. It will have a strong student-oriented focus and an emphasis on assessment of competency. As a practical matter this means we are going to offer a quality education to many more people."

Leavitt said there have been many misconceptions about what the WGU is and what it is not.

"The WGU is not a replacement for existing educational institutions. It's a new element," Leavitt said. "Governors hold the keys to break down the barriers of regulations, bureaucracies, tradition and turf. We're to be a catalyst for a new concept."

"Nebraska has been at the forefront of this concept for years, using technology to provide more educational opportunities across the state," said Gov. Ben Nelson, WGA Chairman. "Our institutions of higher education have a history of working together in this area, and I am excited about the potential to create even more partnerships to better serve students."

The memorandum of understanding states that each governor has 60 days to decide if he wants to participate in the next phase of development. A steering committee of participating governors will be formed, development funds raised and a business plan created.

The implementation plan calls for a very small central operation and numerous local centers. The central operation will do such things as set skills standards with faculty and industry experts; develop assessments, control quality, set requirements for local centers; and provide student services.

The WGU won't offer its own courses, rather it will draw from existing institutions and other providers. It will offer certifications and degrees.

The local centers "franchised" by the WGU would provide support services and would serve as an access point for people wanting to take advantage of the various educational opportunities offered.

The WGU will eventually be a nonprofit independent corporation. The governors said they are serving as the instigator and facilitator.

