

JUN 24 1996

Allen's P. C. B Est. 1888

Reno Gazette-Journal

Monday, June 24, 1996

Western governors to discuss electronic universit^{147 a}

By J.L. Schmidt
ASSOCIATED PRESS

OMAHA, Neb. — Governors of 18 states are getting a firsthand look this weekend at an electronic university that could bring college classes to the masses.

One focus of the annual gathering of the Western Governors Association is the "virtual university," a high-tech computer and satellite delivery of basic college courses.

The three-day meeting in Omaha started Saturday and concludes Monday afternoon. The host is

Gov. Ben Nelson, president of the group which includes states from California to Nebraska and Texas to North Dakota. Representatives from Guam, Samoa and the Northern Mariana Islands also will be there.

Besides the concept of making college courses available to people in out-of-the-way places via home computer, the chief executives will look at ways to clean up federal waste sites, to ensure that computers in one state can communicate with those in another, and to improve the efficiency, safety and

capacity of the transportation system in Western states.

"The West: Forging Opportunity Through Change" is the theme of the three-day convention at Omaha's Red Lion Hotel.

"It is a lot about sharing technology, about states cooperating to meet the same challenges faced by all," Nelson said. "We want to forge opportunity. One thing the states have in common is the need for more technology."

Governors whose states belong to the association will be given 60 days to indicate whether their states will

participate in the virtual university. That would require \$100,000 per state for 1996-97 to help get it started.

David Powers, executive director of the Nebraska Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education, said the structure and programs of the virtual university still are being developed. Costs have not been determined, but most likely will be expensive, he said.

Jean Lovell, director of Gov. Nelson's policy research office, said the governor supports the concept. He hopes the virtual university is

developed with the cooperation and participation of existing colleges and universities, Ms. Lovell said.

She said Western Governors University would improve access to education in the Western states which are large in land mass but small in population.

"We see this as enhancing, not replacing existing universities," Lovell said.

Opponents say they don't see the need for such a radical change because many schools already are developing computer technology on their own.

Lovell said she thinks such concern will fade when several nagging questions are answered.

"Yet to be decided are ways to give tests, develop courses and accredit them," she said. "The of solving those problems depends on the level of participation among existing colleges and universities."

Powers said the virtual university will not have its own faculty members, but will rely mainly on universities and colleges to provide programs and faculty members.