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Western Governors Talk Hi-Tech

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OMAHA, Neb. -- The nation's Western governors want to go the old concept of a college without walls one better, putting a university in cyberspace.

The proposed Western Virtual University would be a high-tech education system that would use computers and satellites to make college courses available "virtually everywhere," said Western Governors Association Chairman and Nebraska Gov. Ben Nelson.

The University of Nebraska has a statewide satellite learning network involving other colleges and universities in the state that reaches students as far away as Guam.

Nelson proposed that a similar system be established covering the 18 states in the association. Details such as funding and administration of the system would be worked out later.

"Adding a university without walls to our brick and mortar institutions is another historic change, a change the West is ready for," Nelson said.

He outlined the proposal Sunday as representatives from the 18 states met to discuss exchanging technology innovations in order to meet the needs of a rapidly developing area of the country.

"We have adapted from the Pony Express to e-mail, from covered wagons to commuter airlines," Nelson said.

The group began its annual meeting Saturday. Before adjourning on Monday, the governors also heard from Federal Communications Commission Chairman Reed Hundt, who talked about FAA efforts to develop regulations covering the changing role of computers, computer networks and telephones.

In addition to working with the private sector, Hundt said Monday, his agency wants to ensure that every public school classroom in America has a telephone line and is ultimately wired for access to the Internet.

Today, 91 percent of those classrooms do not have Internet access and 86 percent do not have a telephone line, he said.

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