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News Brief - 11/22/96

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Drought Management, Higher Education, Electric Utility Restructuring Addressed by Western Governors

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SAN ANTONIO -- Western Governors meeting in San Antonio today adopted long-term recommendations for managing drought, created a task force to ensure consumers have a reliable source of electricity and approved a roll-out strategy for the Western Governors University.

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Ten governors attended the two-day winter meeting of the Western Governors' Association to discuss and develop regional policy. The steering committee for the Western Governors University also met to decide what steps should be taken to move forward on the higher education system that will rely on advanced technology to expand access to higher education and to offer competency-based certifications.

"This meeting gave us the opportunity to set our priorities for the region on a wide-range of issues, some of which we will be taking before Congress and the administration in the coming months," said North Dakota Gov. Ed Schafer, WGA Chairman.

A drought report approved by the governors recommends several steps be taken to improve the federal response to drought and to assist state and local governments in their response efforts. A task force was formed this summer to recommend short- and long-term drought management solutions. This year, the Southwest experienced the worst drought in 25 years.

The report calls for improved monitoring, information sharing and coordination of relief efforts. It also recommends ways to speed up relief efforts affecting agriculture producers.

The Task Force on Electric Industry Restructuring will meet Dec. 5 in Santa Fe to examine the massive restructuring of the western electric power industry already underway. Gov. Fife Symington of Arizona will head the task force. He said the purpose is to ensure the continued reliability and availability of service to all consumers.

States participating in the task force will share information on the rapid changes underway, while recognizing that there are unique conditions which shape the electric power industry in each of the western states. The governors said cooperative action is needed to ensure the reliability of the electric transmission grid as the industry is restructured.

The WGU Steering Committee, which is comprised of governors and other appointees from 13 participating western states, agreed the WGU should be incorporated as soon as practical. Currently housed at the Western Governors' Association, it would become an independent, nonprofit corporation with a board of trustees.

The WGU steering committee is lead by Governors Roy Romer of Colorado and Mike Leavitt of Utah.

Governors attending the meeting included: Fife Symington, Arizona; Roy Romer, Colorado; Benjamin Cayetano, Hawaii; Phil Batt, Idaho; Ben Nelson, Nebraska; Gary Johnson, New Mexico; Ed Schafer, North Dakota; John Kitzhaber, Oregon; George Bush, Texas; Mike Leavitt, Utah.

