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WGU Board Elects Co-Chairs, Appoints Corporate Officers

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SALT LAKE CITY, UT -- The Board of Trustees for the Western Governors University, meeting for the first time since its incorporation, elected Governors Mike Leavitt of Utah and Roy Romer of Colorado as co-chairs and appointed an interim chief executive officer and academic officer to run the nonprofit corporation.

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The board met earlier this week in Washington, DC, and took several actions to formalize its operations following the WGU's incorporation on January 15. The board adopted bylaws that will govern the 13-state operation and elected an executive committee to oversee corporate affairs. Wyoming Gov. Jim Geringer and Nebraska Gov. Ben Nelson will join Leavitt and Romer on the executive committee. A fifth member will be elected at the next board meeting this spring.

Dr. E. Jeffery Livingston, the associate commissioner for technology for the Utah System of Higher Education, will serve as the WGU's chief executive officer and will be based in Salt Lake City. Dr. Robert Albrecht, who coordinates technology projects among the University of Colorado's four campuses, will serve as chief academic officer. He will be based in Denver.

The board noted that these are interim appointments until the WGU is fully operational. It is expected to begin offering courses by early 1998. Livingston and Albrecht previously served as co-directors of the WGU initiative prior to its incorporation and while it was housed at the Western Governors' Association.

"These appointments and the incorporation serve as a real milestone for the WGU," Romer said. "Its key components are still being developed, but the WGU has clearly moved a giant step beyond being a good idea."

Leavitt described the WGU as a "freeport" for educational providers to reach a growing populace of lifelong learners and for students to have access to quality, "anywhere-anytime" educational opportunities. The WGU will use an Internet-based, catalog to broker courses for traditional and nontraditional educational providers, and it will offer its own competency-based degrees and workplace certification.

"The WGU is being described by many higher education experts as one of the most promising and extensive distance learning efforts in the country," Leavitt said. "We are working very hard with the higher education community, the accrediting agencies, and the corporate world to make sure we fulfill that promise by creating a quality learning institution for the Cybercentury."

The board also announced a \$250,000 grant from the AT&T Foundation to assist in the development of the WGU. It is the largest corporate donation to date.

"AT&T is committed to supporting projects that benefit education and serve the needs of the public," said Rick Bailey, AT&T's law and government affairs vice president. "The Western Governors University is clearly such a project. It's a bold, 'break the mold' approach to higher education in western states, and we're very excited to be a part of it."

The board comprises the governors of 13 western states and additional appointees made by each governor. The board members are:

Arizona: Gov. Fife Symington

Colorado: Gov. Roy Romer and John Buechner, President, University of Colorado

Hawaii: Gov. Benjamin Cayetano and Kenneth Mortimer, President, University of Hawaii

Idaho: Gov. Phil Batt and Rayburn Barton, Executive Director, Idaho State Board of Education

Montana: Gov. Marc Racicot

Nebraska: Gov. Ben Nelson and David Powers, Executive Director, Nebraska Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education

Nevada: Gov. Bob Miller and Richard Jarvis, Chancellor, University and Community College System of Nevada

New Mexico: Gov. Gary Johnson and Bruce Hamlett, Executive Director, New Mexico Commission on Higher Education

North Dakota: Gov. Ed Schafer and Larry Isaak, Chancellor, North Dakota University System

Oregon: Gov. John A. Kitzhaber, M.D., and Roger Bassett, Governor's Education and Workforce Policy Advisor

Utah: Gov. Mike Leavitt

Washington: Gov. Gary Locke and Sam Smith, President, Washington State University

Wyoming: Gov. Jim Geringer