

**FINAL
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 19, 2006**

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The Internet to the Hogans

An initiative by State Senator Leonard Tsosie to bring wireless technology to Navajo families living in remote areas of New Mexico

Navajo Students in need of the Internet

Hearing about Senator Leonard Tsosie's *Internet to the Hogans project* to connect Northwestern New Mexico with wireless technology, several Navajo Nation 8th grade students wrote letters to him this week expressing their support.

The 11-year old New Mexico students from Crownpoint and Mariano Lake, an area of the Navajo Reservation located northwest of Grants, New Mexico, have little -- if any -- access to electricity, land and cell phones, the internet, and public television.

Every one of the student letters were written in perfect penmanship thanking the Senator for his efforts. One meticulously penned by 11-year old Bobbi Ann from Coyote Canyon tells how students living in hogans (traditional Navajo dwellings that do not have running water, phones or electricity) really need access to the internet so that they can have more than pen and paper to work with.

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"I don't have a computer, but I really want one because I can do (my homework) on it, instead of paper. So when I'm finished my hand wouldn't hurt," Bobby Ann wrote.

For those of us old enough to remember “penned” assignments that caused calluses, you know what Bobbi Ann is talking about. But, that’s not all Bobbi Ann is concerned about. She wants the same advantages as other students. She wants access to the wealth of information and educational opportunities available through the internet.

With wireless internet access, Bobbi Ann would be able to research, compose, edit, add charts and graphics to her report – a process that provides her with a rich learning experience, involves her parents, and establishes new communication avenues with her teachers. Due to the rugged terrain and winter weather conditions, Navajo students often miss school because they simply can’t get there.

Meeting with the Governor

Hundreds of miles away from Bobby Ann’s home in Mariano Lake, Senator Tsosie, held up a wireless lap top computer in a meeting this past Wednesday with Governor Richardson and 15 members of the *Internet to the Hogan* collaborative.

“Governor,” Senator Tsosie asked, “Imagine if a Navajo student living in a Hogan could have the same access as other students, they would do so much better in school!” Compared to other groups, New Mexico’s Native American student population have greater drop out rates and limited number of students graduating from college. Disparities have been created, in part, due to high turn over in teaching staff, lack of professional development opportunities and limited science and technology resources available to rural and tribal schools throughout the state.

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Senator Tsosie's vision of the project began a year ago when he learned of several independent efforts taking place to provide technology resources to Navajo teachers, parents and students via the internet, phone and television access.

Internet to the Hogans Collaborative

Concerned that the efforts would result in a haphazard telecommunication system with cell towers spoiling the beauty of Navajo lands, Senator Tsosie began convening ***Internet to the Hogan*** meetings with interested parties --- Navajo and non-Navajo engineers, broadcasters, doctors, educators, information technology specialists and providers who represent Crownpoint Institute of Technology (CIT), Navajo Nation Department of Information Technology (NNDIT), Navajo Nation Division of Community Development (NNDICD), Navajo Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (NTRC), Navajo Area Indian Health Service (NIHS), Navajo School Board Association (NSBA), Navajo Nation Communications & Utilities (NNCU), Navajo Education Technology Consortium (NETC), University of New Mexico Center for Native American Health (CNAH), the Ramah Navajo School Board, Tribal Libraries Program of the New Mexico State Library, University of New Mexico Center for Telehealth, the University of New Mexico School of Medicine Office of Diversity, Native American Television Network (NATVN), Navajo Nation White Rock Chapter, Educational Funding Group (EFG), IBM, Gallup McKinley County Schools, Wingate High School, Health-e-Innovations, Sacred Wind Communication Inc., Internetwork Experts, Edgenet Technologies, Inc., KNME-TV and NNTV5.

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During the series of ***Internet to the Hogan*** meetings held from June to December, the participants representing state government, tribal government and the private sector worked together to identify shared resources and cost savings in order to construct a

robust and reliable wireless telecommunication grid system for Northwestern New Mexico.

Health, Education, Language and Literacy Resources

As the roundtable presentation continued, Governor Richardson listened closely as the partners explained how the *Internet to the Hogan* Initiative will provide education, health, and public television resources.

In addition to receiving Internet resources, Bobby Ann and other Navajo students will also receive digital television services, including public television, through her own Navajo Nation Television station, NNTV5. NNTV5 is operated by the Navajo Nation broadcasting in both Navajo and English. Senator Tsosie imagines a day when Navajo students will be able to see a bilingual *Big Bird*, who will help Navajo children maintain and develop literacy in both Navajo and English languages.

“Navajo Nation TV5 is excited to be a part of Senator Tsosie’s *Internet to the Hogans* Initiative. In addition to internet access, Navajo students will have access to digital television resources, which may include Pre-K to college curriculum. It will also connect Navajo people living in remote areas of New Mexico with the rest of the world providing them with local, national and international news,” Kee Long, Manager of NNTV5 stated.

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5-5-5

During the meeting, Dr. Valerie Romero Leggott, an Associate Dean of the University of New Mexico, School of Medicine Office of Diversity, advised the Governor that wireless connectivity will also help Navajo mid and high school students

learn about medical careers and provide access to curriculum, such as advanced placement courses in Math and Sciences.

“The Internet to the Hogan Initiative creates an electronic highway to Navajo hogans. It’s a highway designed to add resources without taking away from the Navajo way of life,” Dr. Dale Alverson, University of New Mexico Center for Telehealth, explained in an interview after the Governor’s meeting. *“This effort compliments other state initiatives, while making it possible to deliver services in both Navajo and English,”* he added.

The Governor also listened to presentations from the Tribal Libraries Program of the New Mexico State Library, Sacred Wind, a phone company dedicated to the Navajo Nation, and Navajo Education Technology Consortium (NETC), which is working with the IBM Corporation’s community liaison to secure matching funding through the federal Erate program, a program that provides up to 90 percent matching dollars for technology applications valued at approximately \$30 million for this project. Potential additional matching funds may become available through federal utility service grants.

Additional support for the project was expressed by Sandoval County Manager Debbie Hays, who advised the Governor of a similar County effort that she says will revolutionize the delivery of health care and education and provide ample opportunity for economic development.

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6-6-6

Recognizing the need to insure that New Mexico's Navajo students are not left behind in the evolving digital world, Governor Richardson expressed his support for funding a two year project, and plans to meet with the group again to finalize state support for this year. The overall project includes wireless applications, digital television, telehealth resources, culturally relevant programming, distance learning and technical support.

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