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ARIZONA CORPORATION COMMISSION

Arizona Corporation Commissioner Andy Tobin Unveils New Program To Help Rural Arizona Schools Connect to High-Speed Internet

(Phoenix) Responding to Governor Ducey's 2017 State of the State address, Commissioner Andy Tobin urges to the Corporation Commission to answer the Governor's call and adopt an innovative program that will improve education for students all across the state by increasing internet access.

"There is a real and troubling digital divide when it comes to internet access in our urban and rural areas," said Commissioner Andy Tobin in a letter to a Corporation Commission telecommunications docket, "Every student must be afforded the same opportunity to learn, including those who live on tribal lands, in some inner city areas, or in the most remote reaches of the state."

This initiative would complement Governor Ducey's commitment to bringing technology to rural Arizona.

In his State of the State, the Governor said, "Too many students, specifically in our rural areas are missing out. Let's fix this, by connecting these rural schools to high-speed internet. And let's couple it with a statewide computer science and coding initiative. This session, let's break the firewall and get these kids connected."

The program released by Commissioner Tobin does just that. It creates an exciting partnership with the Governor's Office, the State Superintendent's office, and a non-profit called **EducationSuperHighway** to create a state match of funds in order to meet the connectivity needs of rural Arizona. The total match is estimated to be \$8-\$13 million.

The state match could then help districts draw funds available from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and could equal an estimated \$80-\$100 million in federal construction dollars that would go directly into the economies of cities and towns across Arizona.

To accomplish the state match, Commissioner Tobin proposes establishing a new program which uses the Arizona Universal Service Fund (AUSF) to provide a portion of the state matching funds. The purpose of the AUSF is to support telecommunications carriers which serve in high cost areas of rural Arizona. A one-time distribution of \$8 million from the existing AUSF would serve as the large portion of the state's match. The program would be limited in order to take advantage of the immediate federal funding opportunities available, and the program would be eliminated after all the funds have been dispersed to schools and libraries.

"The AUSF must adapt to changes in new telecommunications technology and should be used where possible to harness benefits provided at the federal level and in concert with federal funding mechanisms," said Tobin. "For this reason, I see much promise and possibility of using the AUSF to help

permanently rewire the telecommunications landscape in these rural areas.”

The Commission would need to undertake emergency rulemaking to revise the AUSF so it can be used in such a way to meet deadlines for schools to apply for grants. Commissioner Tobin’s entire letter can be found at www.azcc.gov by going to eDocket and entering docket number RT-00000H-97-0137. The program will be discussed at a Staff Meeting tomorrow, January 11th at 10:00 a.m.