

LEAVITT CALLS TECHNOLOGY INDUSTRY TO ACTION

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Technology wonks may deserve the credit for thrusting Utah to the top of the world computer industry, but Gov. Mike Leavitt warns that the industry could lose its high standing unless its leaders take to the streets to fight resistance to change.

Fear of change will prevent people, government and business from weaving technology into their daily activities, and that threatens to stifle the industry's growth, he said.

“It will be the sociology that will limit us, not the technology,” he added. “This barrier may be the largest single barrier to this industry's future.”

Leavitt's rallying cry fell upon sympathetic ears at the annual Utah Information Technology Association's Members' Day at Snowbird Resort.

About 300 industry leaders heard the governor's address, a keynote that included campaign-style points that highlighted Leavitt's first-term accomplishments and outlined direction for a new term. The Republican governor announced plans last month to run for re-election.

Utah already has pioneered much technology terrain, according to Leavitt.

The industry has grown to 1,800 companies that either have headquarters or operations in Utah. It generates \$6.1 billion in revenues and employs nearly 35,000.

Government has helped, too.

By the end of the year, every Utah school and college will be linked together on a computer network, allowing instructors to teach long-distance via television monitors, permitting students to tap libraries around the world via the Internet and enabling researchers to collaborate on their studies via e-mail.

The governor's office has enlisted technology companies for SmartUTAH, a public-private venture to engage even the smallest businesses in electronic commerce. Higher-education officials are exploring the creation of a “Virtual University” with other Western states. States also use the SmartStates program to swap ideas about computerizing government services.

Yet, resistance already has popped up in the form of inflexible regulations and standards, the governor said. A Nevada law bars the use of telemedicine, or the practice of medicine via two-way video, in Wendover. National accreditation rules threaten plans for the virtual university.

Technology companies must help remove barriers like these, Leavitt said. “It's time for this industry to stand up and take responsibility politically.”

Nancy Gibbs welcomed the governor's messages.

``He's got grand ideas, and I commend him for his foresight," said Gibbs, a member of the advisory Information Technology Commission and executive director of the Exchange Carriers of Utah, a trade group of the state's small telephone companies.

Rod Budge, president of a Salt Lake City Internet company, Intelenet, applauded the governor's efforts to bring attention to challenges facing his industry.

He said, ``It helps companies like ours that are trying to bridge the knowledge gap for companies that are not yet embracing the new technologies."