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**Central Asian officials learn about state's broadband expansion initiatives**

*Exchange focuses on strategies, impact on entrepreneurship*

**ALBUQUERQUE**—Today, representatives from five Central Asian countries visited Albuquerque to meet with members of the Office of Broadband Access and Expansion (OBAE) to learn firsthand about New Mexico's broadband expansion and deployment.

Twelve entrepreneurs and representatives of organizations encouraging commercial and social entrepreneurship efforts from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan visited New Mexico as part of the International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP), the U.S. Department of State's premier professional exchange program. The program focuses on youth entrepreneurship and economic, political, and social factors influencing and encouraging development of small businesses, entrepreneurship, and innovation.

The program also highlights the role of governmental, non-governmental, public-private partnerships, and other groups in fostering business creation.

“This interaction was a tremendous opportunity to exchange ideas and show these nations how we are providing crucial broadband services to our constituents,” said **Drew Lovelace, OBAE’s acting director**. “These countries have rural areas and mountainous terrain like New Mexico, and we are excited to demonstrate ways to connect families and locations. Broadband is vital to bringing business, government, and public-private partnerships to the masses.”

OBAE leadership explained to participants how New Mexico stakeholders have developed strategies for expanding broadband access in communities of need as well as how broadband access impacts entrepreneurship and small business development, particularly in rural communities. The state offered advice regarding high-speed internet deployment, particularly in remote regions.

OBAE also discussed current state and federal grant programs, planning processes and how funding is used.

Global Ties ABQ, a nonprofit with more than 35 years of experience connecting Albuquerque and the world, arranged the New Mexico program for this IVLP in partnership with the U.S. Department of State. For nearly 85 years, the IVLP has helped strengthen U.S. engagement with countries around the world and cultivate lasting relationships by connecting current and emerging international leaders with their American counterparts.

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*The Office of Broadband Access and Expansion is dedicated to serving New Mexico with a commitment to make high-speed broadband accessible to all New Mexicans. OBAE’s mission is to expand and improve high-speed internet service with passionate leadership that drives bold, equitable, affordable and inclusive broadband solutions. OBAE seeks results that honor the state’s rich heritage and elevate quality of life for all.*