Governor's Office of Science, Innovation and Technology and Enterprise IT Services announce summer cyber challenge for Nevada's students in partnership with SANS Institute-- $650,000 in scholarships available

Carson City, Nevada – The Office of Science, Innovation and Technology together with Nevada Enterprise IT Services today encouraged high school juniors and seniors, and community college and college students from Nevada to try CyberStart. CyberStart is an online education program allowing students to become "cyber protection agents." Students can attempt more than 100 challenges similar to those faced in the real world and earn points and badges for solving them. Students don't have to travel to participate; all they need is an Internet-connected computer.

"The need for cybersecurity professionals is growing in Nevada, both in State government and in the private sector. This challenge is a great opportunity for students who might be interested in a career in cybersecurity and want to know what it is like and whether they are good at it," said **Brian Mitchell, Director of the Governor's Office of Science, Innovation and Technology (OSIT).** "In Nevada, the projected growth rate in the number of jobs requiring cybersecurity skills through 2022 is 30 percent. These jobs have an average wage of about $85,000."

Last month, Governor Sandoval signed legislation creating the Nevada Office of Cyber Defense Coordination which will be tasked with detecting, preventing, and responding to attacks. This challenge will help raise awareness of the career opportunities available in cybersecurity and identify promising future professionals in this important field. For students interested in pursuing this career, the College of Southern Nevada recently started a new cybersecurity degree program.

"This is a terrific opportunity for young cyber enthusiasts in Nevada to utilize and build additional skills in this area. The scholarships are a terrific way for students to take their skills and passions and receive funding for higher education," said **Shannon Rahming, Enterprise IT Services Administrator and Nevada's Chief Information Officer**. "The entire state will be the recipient of the talents provided by our future Cyber Security experts and we look forward to having these skilled students join the ranks of other Cyber specialists in the state of Nevada. The SANS Institute is the most trusted and by far the largest source for information security training and security certification in the world, and Nevada is proud to be one of only 7 states chosen to compete for scholarships provided by the SANS Institution for the 2017 CyberStart."

An introductory "practice" version of CyberStart will be available until July 28, 2017 and the full-scale program will run from August 1-28, 2017. Students can access CyberStart at: www.sans.org/cyberstartUS.

How the game works: Each player starts as a "cyber protection agent" responsible for protecting an important operational base. The student chooses and solves challenges, earning points along the way. A cyber protection agent field manual provides answers to questions that may arise and hints help when players get stuck. When the player has solved a sufficient number challenges at one level, a new level opens up and new challenges appear – for a total of 31 layers. Experienced players call CyberStart "addictive" and say it is particularly good because everyone can excel, not just a few superstars.

When asked why SANS is making this investment, **SANS Director of Research, Alan Paller,** said "Because the nation desperately needs more highly-skilled cyber professionals,

and we have new evidence that CyberStart will radically improve the quality and preparation of people entering the cybersecurity field. SANS trains more than 30,000 advanced cybersecurity professionals each year for military and intelligence organizations and for large high-tech companies in the U.S. and its allies. We discovered that those who have mastered the topics taught and measured in the CyberStart program do far better than others in the advanced cybersecurity courses that prepare the critically needed people. By opening CyberStart to hundreds of thousands of students we may be able to help the nation identify the next geeration of talented people who will excel in this critical field."

Participants who excel will share in $150,000 in scholarships for further cyber education and will be eligible to compete for $500,000 in scholarships for college and graduate-level training in cybersecurity preparing them for certifications widely sought by employers. Nevada students will be competing with students from six other states for these scholarships. The scholarships are sponsored by the SANS Institute.

Background on the Office of Cyber Defense Coordination: Assembly Bill 471 establishes the Office of Cyber Defense Coordination within the Department of Public Safety. This office will function as the state's first Executive Branch Agency devoted entirely to cybersecurity efforts, and will serve as a "nerve center" for statewide cybersecurity preparedness, risk assessment, response, and threat mitigation. The bill also sets forth a legislative declaration regarding the importance of cybersecurity with relation to protecting critical infrastructure. The bill specifically highlights the role of cybersecurity in protecting commerce, ensuring the delivery of essential services to the public in the event of a cyber breach, and the role cybersecurity efforts play in higher education and as a 21st century career pathway.

Background on the College of Southern Nevada's (CSN) Cybersecurity training program: Funded in part by a grant from the Governor's Office of Science, Innovation and Technology, CSN's cybersecurity training program now has degree options in network security and digital forensics. CSN will add two more cyber-related associate degree programs in the next two years.