

From the Desk of  
Senator  
Lynn P. Findley

March 31, 2021

Colleagues,

I write to you today regarding SB 16, a bill that you will have the opportunity to vote on today. There has been a little confusion surrounding this bill and I wanted to take the opportunity to explain it and hopefully answer any questions or concerns you may have.

First, SB 16 is one of my bills relating directly to HB 2012 from the 2017 Legislative Session, in which the Eastern Oregon Border Economic Development Region was created. Over the past few years, the Eastern Oregon Border Economic Development Board has identified that Malheur County has very strong potential for economic success, but the Region has experienced stagnant growth, economic decline, and workforce challenges in recent years, while neighboring communities of Idaho have seen significant development. One of the contributing factors is a shortage of rural residential housing options in comparison to Idaho. For your reference, in the past year there have been 165 homes built in neighboring communities in Idaho and only 31 in all of Malheur County.

SB 16 would allow up to one hundred 2-acre lots of non-viable (Class IV-VIII soils) farmland to be rezoned for rural residential use. I understand that rezoning can be a controversial issue, but it is important to note that this is not high-value farmland, nor is it practical for reasonably obtaining a profit through farming. We have worked extensively with the Oregon Farm Bureau and the Malheur County Farm Bureau on crafting language. Within SB 16 is an irrevocable deed restriction requiring the property owner to acknowledge the protected rights of farm and rangeland practices in the area.

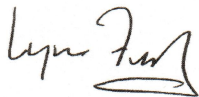
This bill is not directed towards low-income housing. It would instead work towards attracting higher wage earners working in the Border Region while living in neighboring communities in Idaho. This negatively impacts economic development, workforce attraction and retention, and tax base stability in the Border Region.

Resolutions have recently been passed by Malheur County, the City of Vale and the City of Ontario in support of SB 16.

Finally, the intent of SB 16 is not to erode current land use regulations. The Eastern Oregon Border Economic Development Region is not a pilot project and this bill could not be extended to other areas in Oregon. I understand how important it is to protect our valuable agricultural land, but we need some avenue for limited rural housing on non-viable farmland in the Border Region. We cannot take a one size-fits-all approach to land use in this area of the state.

Please let me know if you have any other questions and I would be happy to have a conversation with you.

All my best,



Lynn P. Findley