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NEWS RELEASE

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Bipartisan Legislation Aims to Spur Economic Development at Oregon's Border with Idaho

Speaker Tina Kotek (D-North Portland) and Rep. Cliff Bentz (R-Ontario) introduce the Eastern Oregon Border Economic Development Act

SALEM – To address the competitive challenges that Eastern Oregon communities face because of their proximity to the rapidly growing Boise Valley in Idaho, House Speaker Tina Kotek (D-North Portland) and Representative Cliff Bentz (R-Ontario) today introduced the Eastern Oregon Border Economic Development Act (House Bill 2012).

The bill would designate Ontario, Vale, Nyssa, and the immediate surrounding area in southeast Oregon as the “Eastern Oregon Border Economic Development Region.” It would create a new, locally driven, seven-member board to identify policies and strategies that would promote workforce and economic growth in the region and award targeted grants and loans to support economic growth. The bill requests \$10 million to support the initiative.

The idea for a bill focused on supporting economic competitiveness in the Ontario area came out of a trip Speaker Kotek made to Eastern Oregon last summer at Rep. Bentz's invitation. It was the first time in recent memory that a Speaker of the Oregon House of Representatives had visited Malheur and Baker Counties.

“I want to thank Speaker Kotek for her visit to Eastern Oregon last summer, and for her recognition of the challenges facing the eastern border region of Oregon,” Rep. Bentz said. “This bill, if passed, and if funded, would provide a significant economic boost to Malheur County.”

During the three-day trip last June, Rep. Bentz hosted a series of meetings with local leaders and residents, as well as tours of local businesses along Oregon's border with Idaho.

“When I was there, I saw firsthand how businesses and communities in Eastern Oregon are struggling to compete with the fast-growing metro area across the border,” Speaker Kotek said. “Each community in Oregon faces unique challenges – from North Portland to Ontario. We are at our best when we find a way to come together and solve them as Oregonians. This bill is a prime example.”

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