

# What is the "Brain Drain"

and why do so many educated people leave rural America?



## -289k

Rural America saw its first ever total population decline between the 2010 and 2020 censuses

"Brain drain is defined as the migration of [ ] personnel in search of the better standard of living and quality of life, higher salaries, access to advanced technology and more stable political conditions in different places worldwide."



### So why do so many people leave?



#### Finances

84% of rural counties in the U.S. face "persistent poverty" despite the fact the median income in urban areas is only \$2k more than rural areas



#### Opportunity

Rural economies have been decimated by the decline in manufacturing with few investments in new industries



#### Politics

While the 2016 & 2020 elections brought renewed vigor, the demographic divide is a "familiar story of American politics"

## Does it really all come down to education?

# 14%

gap between urban and rural communities and higher education attainment

- Rural and urban Americans graduate high school at the same rates
- However, urban Americans not only go to college in higher numbers, but they also graduate college at higher rates
- After graduation, rural Americans are also less likely to return home
- One explanation may be that salaries for those with a college degree vary by up to \$21k in rural versus urban locations



## Can the trend be reversed?

- While the federal government can't necessarily fix our political climate, it can make policy moves to help offset some of the reasons why so many rural Americans leave home
- Eliminating student debt or implementing relief programs could help mitigate salary differences
- Price controls could be put on the cost of higher education at the state and federal level to temper skepticism of the value of attaining a higher degree
- Given the rise of working from home, pay standardization could be implemented across locations in various industries



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