

# News From The States

# EVENING WRAP

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By [Kate Queram](#)

Economic news in 2023 can be distilled to a trio of seemingly opposing topics: A [booming economy](#), steady [job growth](#) — and a persistent labor shortage. This is less an aberration than [a preview](#) of the near future, when the number of retiring baby boomers will [far outnumber](#) the Gen Zers entering the workforce to take their place.

It's already happening. Since 2019, aging workers have accounted for [an estimated 70%](#) of the decline in labor force participation, and economists expect that drag to worsen over time. Basically, boomers don't want to work anymore (...[the irony](#)), and that is why we will continue to have more jobs than people.



## The Big Takeaway

Worker shortages will ebb and flow in some job markets, but for others, the problem will be chronic. For some industries, it already is. Health care workers, for example, have been in [short supply](#) for decades; a longstanding problem laid bare by the pandemic and the surging demand from all those retiring boomers. [In September](#), there were just .29 unemployed workers for every health sector job. The disparity will likely get worse, particularly in low-wage health care jobs, where shortages could grow by as much as 3.2 million [in the next five years](#).

**It's a daunting prognosis for rural communities, which have struggled for years to recruit and retain health workers.** In Virginia, nearly a third of residents live in remote areas with [inadequate numbers of providers](#). Among the most underserved is a cluster of counties in the state's Southside region, where residents are routinely forced to choose between waiting for months to see a local doctor or driving long distances to urgent care facilities where routine appointments are usually not covered by insurance, [the Virginia Mercury reported](#).



*Health workers in front of Old Dominion University's Medical Mobile Clinic, which treats residents in the rural community of Franklin.*

*(Photo by JW Caterine for the Virginia Mercury)*

**The state-level shortage is a microcosm of the national problem.** Both stem from underinvestment (Virginia ranks 38th for public health spending in a country that [chronically underfunds](#) public health), [stagnant wages](#), and [burnout](#). Those issues have long impacted recruitment, which is even more difficult in rural areas without the type of amenities that appeal to young medical professionals, said Tracy Douglas, CEO of the Virginia Community Healthcare Association.

“A lot of folks are focused on quality of life, and that means access to activities and events,” Douglas said. “Many of these rural communities don’t have those kind of activities available.”

[A report](#) prepared last year at the request of state lawmakers proposed a slate of changes to improve staffing levels, from higher wages to better professional development opportunities. The recommendations most corroborated by research and stakeholders were also the most sweeping, including a directive to address the root causes of stress and burnout, “such as inappropriate patient-provider ratios,” “low and/or differential compensation,” and “lack of basic supplies.” Absent policy intervention, the report cautioned, the problem will get worse.

“If current trends persist, nursing, primary care, and behavioral health workforce shortages will increase across Virginia,” it said.



*Comin' in.*  
(Photo by Getty Images)

**Options are similarly limited for dental patients in rural Alabama**, where providers are so scarce that residents (at least, those with access to reliable transportation) regularly drive up to an hour for routine appointments. Others

simply go without care, [the Alabama Reflector reported](#).

In general, rural residents [are less likely](#) to get routine dental care than people who live in urban areas. (Because of that, they're also more likely to need restorative, surgery or emergency dental services.) The disparity is due in part to the overall shortage of rural dentists, which experts said is the result of 1980s spending cuts that decimated dental school budgets. Dentists who graduated before then are now [beginning to retire](#), and in rural areas, there's often no one to take their place, said Dr. Zack Studstill, executive director of the Alabama Dental Association.

"They were replaced pretty well in metropolitan areas, but again, in rural Alabama, they were not being replaced," he said.

**But there's reason for optimism, he added.** The University of Alabama at Birmingham has successfully placed three dentists in high-need areas under a program that forgives loans for graduates who work full-time for five years in high-need areas. An additional 12 students are under contract, Studstill said.

"It's going to take time," he said. But the program "is beginning to really move."



*Moving is fun when they give you cash to do it!  
(Photo via the Indiana Capital Chronicle)*

**Also moving: Remote workers who can do their jobs from wherever they'd like.** At least three dozen Indiana communities are vying for their attention via

incentive programs that offer cash bonuses, coworking spaces, museum passes and other goodies to out-of-state workers who are willing to relocate. So far, at least 337 have taken the bait, [per the Indiana Capital Chronicle](#).

“If you put yourself in the shoes of these remote workers, they’re moving for very personal reasons. Maybe they want something more affordable or closer to amenities that they like. Maybe that’s in a college town, but it’s also the smaller towns,” said Evan Hock, cofounder of [MakeMyMove](#), an online directory that connects remote workers with incentive programs across the country. “It’s really an opportunity for these communities to kind of differentiate themselves and not just offer cash, but find ways to sort of plug people into the community.”

Municipalities that partner with MakeMyMove to recruit new residents are required to have a local sponsor. Most also receive backing from the Indiana Economic Development Corporation, which provides matching funds to mayors and economic development corporations for talent recruitment and retention initiatives, including incentive programs.

The details of those offers vary by community, though all of them provide cash, Hock said.

In rural Daviess County, it’s \$5,000, plus an annual state parks pass, a checking account with a \$250 bonus, a behind-the-scenes winery tour, and tickets to local attractions. In the college town of Bloomington, the package includes coworking space, networking opportunities and a board seat at a local nonprofit.

Most of the transplants seem happy with their moves, Hock added. More than 80% stay for at least a year.

“We haven’t seen much evidence that people are kind of hopping around,” he continued. “These are people who are moving to find that new home.”

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[cut costs, Rhode Island public transit would have to slash 40 unfilled driver positions](#)



## State of Our Democracy

Voting rights groups last week asked the Idaho Supreme Court to hear a lawsuit challenging new voter registration laws after a county judge dismissed [the case](#), saying in a brief that the policies “specifically, and by design, target a disfavored group by imposing unnecessary barriers to voting,” which is “impermissible by any measure under the Idaho Constitution,” [per the Idaho Capital Sun](#).



*Bring your paperwork!*

*(Photo by Otto Kitsinger/for the Idaho Capital Sun)*

[The law](#), passed in March along mostly party lines, was designed to standardize voter registration procedures, ensuring the requirements are uniform whether a resident registers in person on Election Day, online, or with a third-party organization, according to Secretary of State Phil McGrane, its lead sponsor. Previously, those practices varied by county and by method of registration, officials said.

Under the law, residents can prove their identity and their residency with a current Idaho driver's license. Idahoans who don't have a license — or haven't updated their address after moving — can fill out a voter registration card but will not be issued a ballot or be allowed to vote until they can provide documentation to prove their residency. (Acceptable documentation includes a school enrollment form, a mortgage deed or rental agreement, a utility (cell phones don't count) or tax bill, a bank statement, or "a communication on letterhead from a public or private social service agency registered with the secretary of state verifying the applicant is homeless and attesting to the applicant's residence for registration purposes." Easy peasy!) That documentation must be presented in person to a county clerk ahead of Election Day or at the polls on the day of the election.

The law also creates a free ID card for people 18 and older who have not had a driver's license in the previous six months, ostensibly a replacement for student ID cards, which were removed from the list of acceptable voter ID via [a separate piece of legislation](#) (which is the subject of [a separate lawsuit](#)).



*Yeah, we're gonna need to see some ID.  
(Photo by Getty Images)*

**Combined, the two policies make voting “significantly harder” for a lot of people**, including students who are 18 but still in school, according to the plaintiffs. Ada County Judge Samuel Hoagland disagreed, ruling last month that the lawmakers had addressed those concerns by creating a free ID card “as an alternate form of acceptable voter identification.”

McGrane praised the decision, saying in a statement that the law closed various loopholes in the state’s voter registration process as part of a broader effort to “build confidence in Idaho’s elections.”

“I firmly believe that ensuring access to voting and maintaining security in elections are not conflicting goals,” he said. “We have a great elections system here in Idaho, and it was great to see that affirmed in this case.”

The high court is scheduled to hear oral arguments in the case on Dec. 11. An attorney for the plaintiffs said he’s hopeful the high court will rule on the appeal before the law takes effect in January, either by striking down the policy or by allowing the challenge to proceed in district court.

**ID, please:** [Iowa county zoning administrator was fired for criticizing her boss ... Lafayette area lawmaker expected to be chosen as next Louisiana House speaker ... Three Michigan localities voted to adopt ranked choice voting. But additional roadblocks remain. ... New Jersey’s next Legislature will have fewer female lawmakers ... Monday numbers: North Carolina voter rolls look different than they did eight years ago ... Mapping the Issues: How Ohio’s ballot measures stack up against recent elections, one another ... Ohio Gov. DeWine ‘accepts’ will of the people on abortion, marijuana, but hold on ... Rhode Islanders are worried about democracy. What they blame depends on their political party. ... U.S. Sen. Tim Scott \(R-S.C.\) drops out of 2024 presidential race ... Virginia voters gave Democrats control of the legislature. What will it mean for policy?](#)



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## One Last Thing

There is, apparently, a completed full-length film about Wile E. Coyote and the Roadrunner, which is, apparently, the subject of [a lot of studio drama](#). The movie was shelved, but then it was unshelved, and then it ran right off a cliff and just sort of [hovered there for a minute](#) before falling, but it was fine, and now it's being shopped around to other studios. [Meep meep](#).

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1414 Raleigh Rd #127

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