

A Great Market for Job Seekers

But employers wonder where all the applicants went



*Alaska Association on
Developmental
Disabilities*

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Some COVID-Era Headlines ...

“Where Are America’s Missing Workers” – Bloomberg.com

“4.3 Million Workers Are Missing in America” – Wall Street Journal

“Too Many Jobs, Not Enough People” – Alaska’s News Source

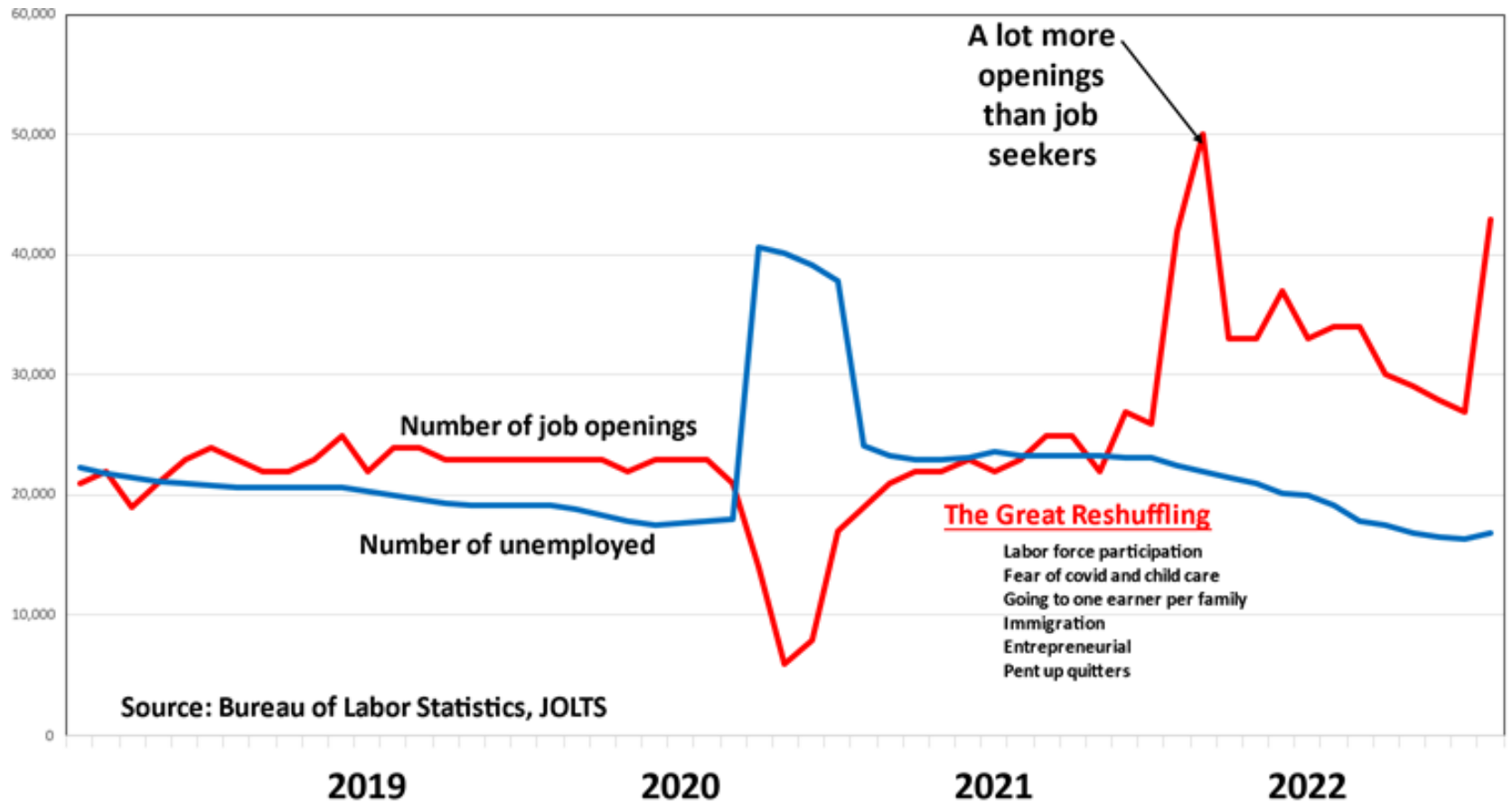
“Anchorage Employers Have Jobs, But Few Applicants” - ADN

“Economic Impact of Missing Workers Could Be Significant” - NPR

“The Most Unusual Job Market in Modern American History”
- Washington Post



Alaska's Jumpy Labor Market



Anyone heard of “the Great Resignation”

The professor who coined the phrase, and whose academic expertise is in the reasons people quit their jobs, predicted we’d have this problem when we came out of the pandemic because:

1. Backlog of resignations because the pandemic made people jittery about leaving their jobs for a while;
2. Burnout, partly for COVID-specific reasons;
3. Widespread re-evaluation of priorities (“pandemic epiphanies”);
4. Reluctance of some workers to give up remote work.



A Catchy Phrase Can Be Problematic

The “Great Resignation” remains one of the buzziest economic stories of 2021. But the more people talk about it, the more I wonder whether most people know what they’re talking about. As so often happens with other nifty phrases and neologisms, use of the term and abuse of the term are in equal proportion.”

- Three Myths of the Great Resignation, *The Atlantic*, 12/21



Patterns in Alaska's "Missing" Workers?

- First, the biggest divergence from normal dropout rates was in people 60+ years old.
- Second, the second biggest divergence from normal dropout rates was in people 30-39, which is harder to interpret, but almost certainly has something to do with childcare.



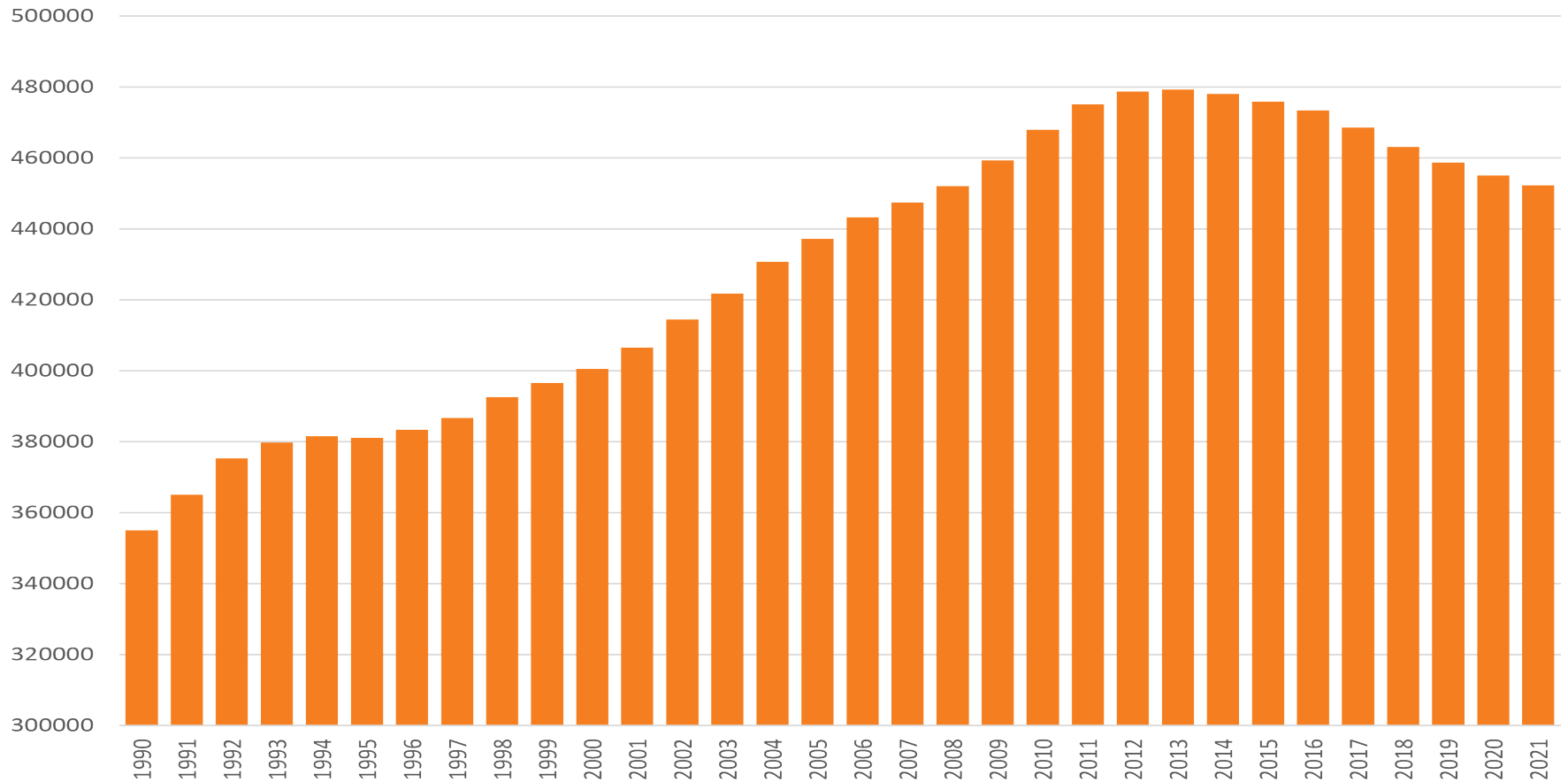
So What?

Before we get to that, I want to mention something that's specific to Alaska that will amplify the "so what."



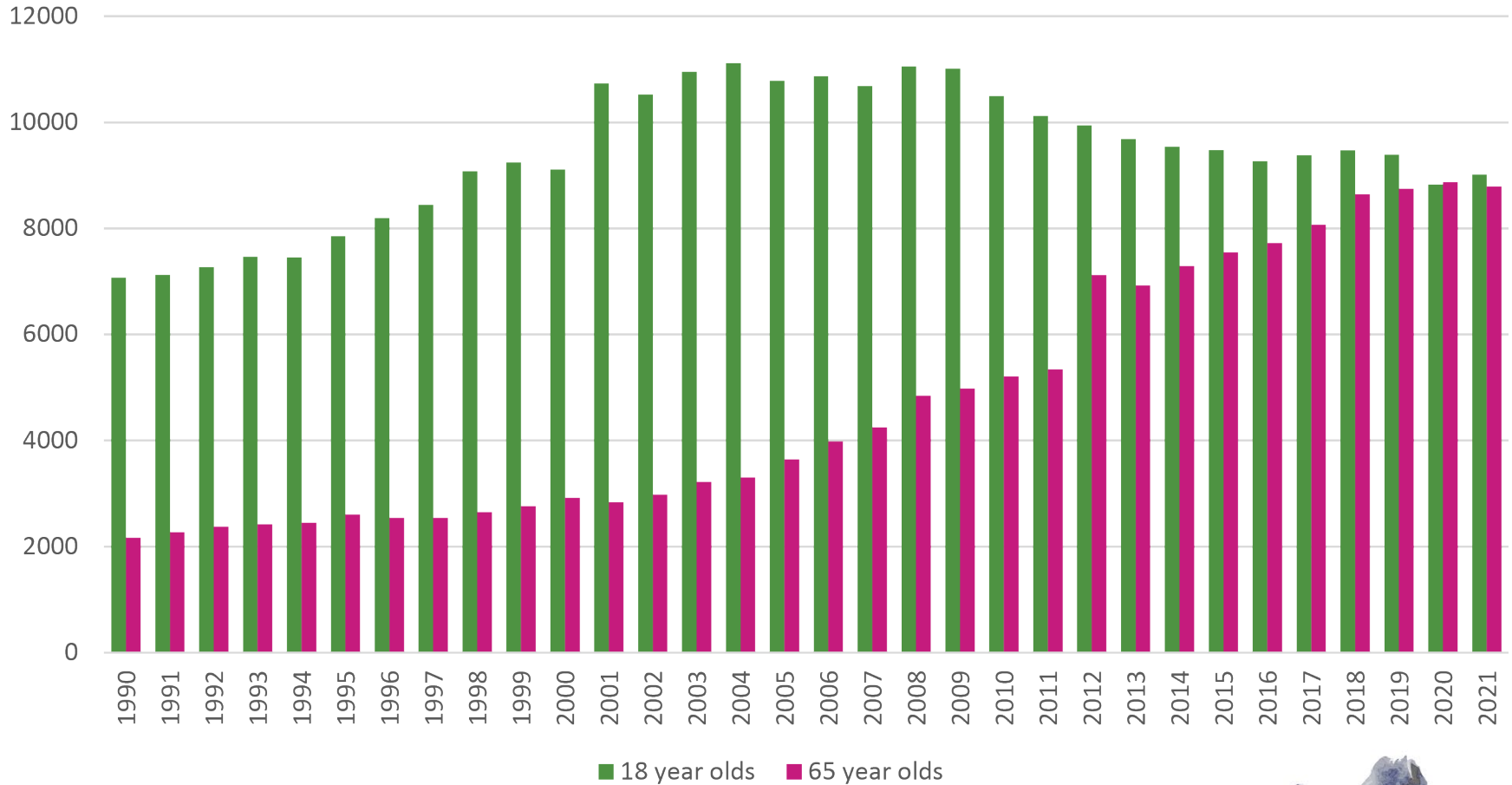
Important Pre-COVID Trends

Working Age (18-64) Population 1990-2021



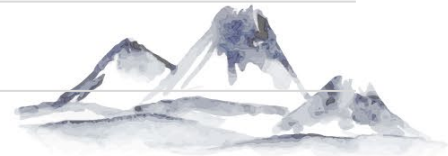
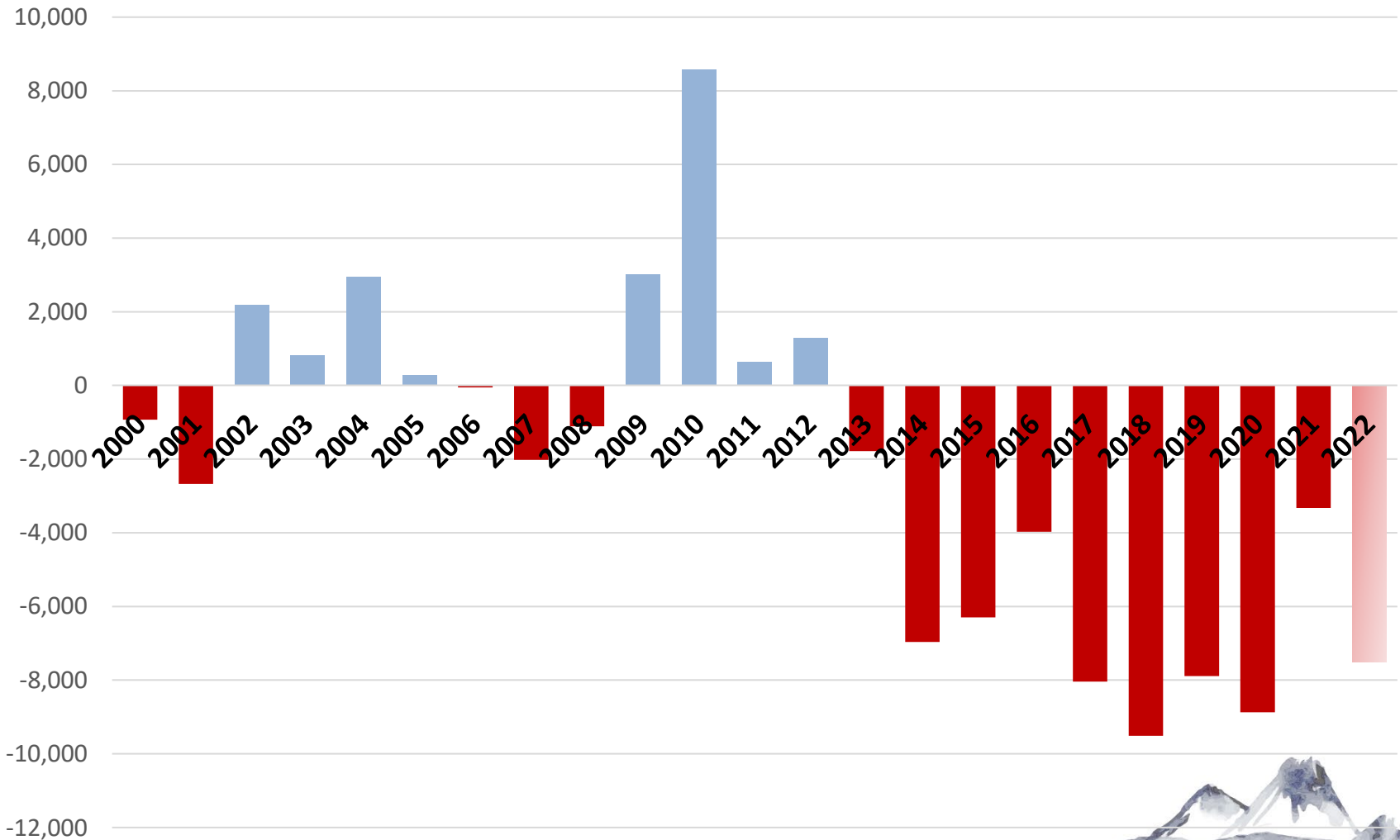
Important Pre-COVID Trends

Turned 18 yrs old vs. Turned 65 yrs old 1990-2021



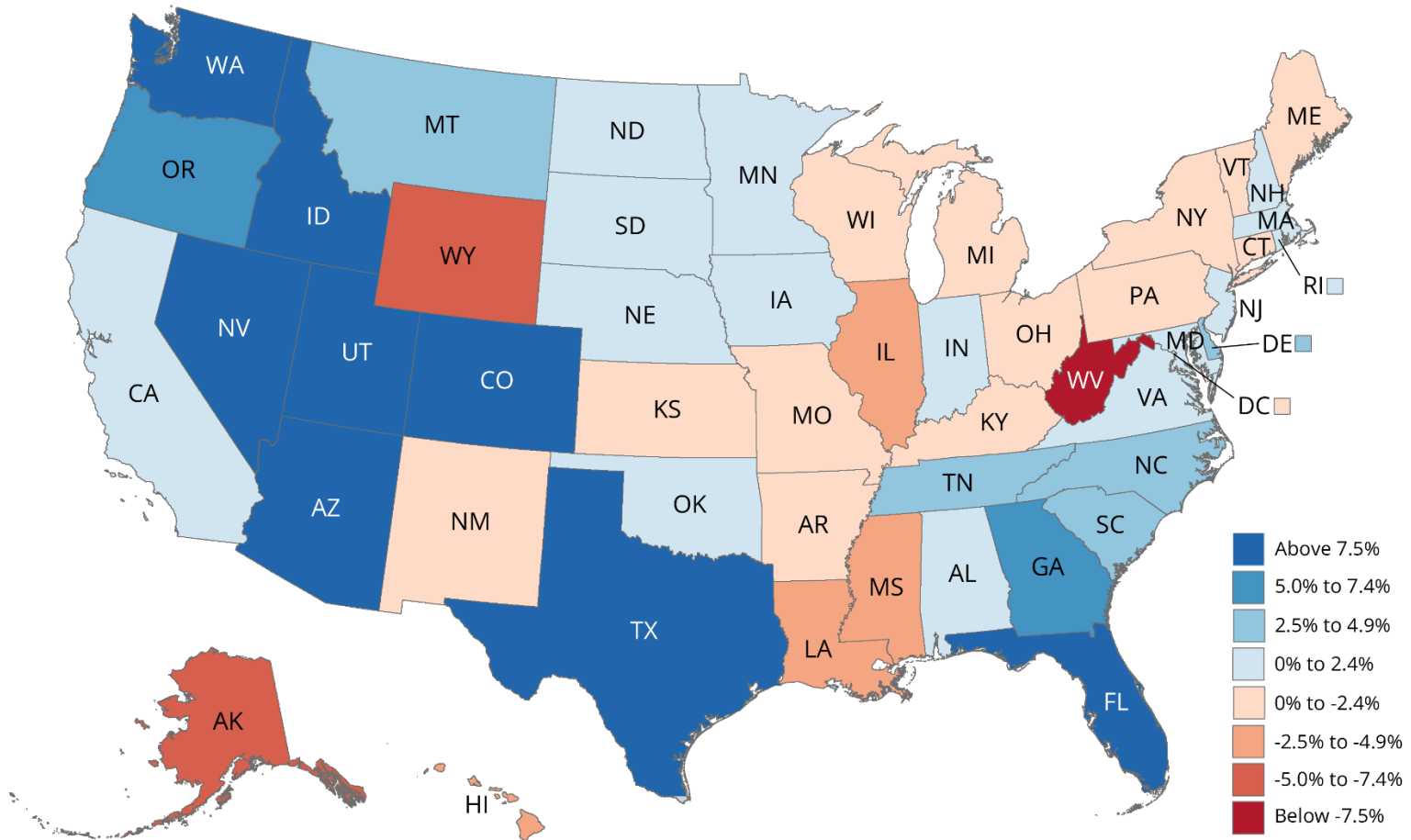
Important Pre-COVID Trends

Alaska Net Migration, 2000-2022



Important Pre-COVID Trends

Percentage Change in Working Age (18-64) population 2013-2021



Back to the “So What?”

The current job market that strongly favors job seekers is unlikely to change any time soon.

It's much more than just a COVID thing, especially in Alaska, although the pandemic disruptions were a factor.



What Can Employers Do About It?

Give job seekers more of what they say they want:

- Money
- Opportunities for advancement
- Meaningful work, respect
- Flexibility
- Childcare solutions and other creative as well as traditional benefits



What Can Employers Do About It?

Refrain from unproductive ideological scapegoating and oversimplification (“people these days just don’t want to work because of unemployment insurance,” or “we just need to raise the minimum wage to \$20 an hour,” etc.).



What Can Employers Do About It?

Realize that something big has changed and examine business models, recruitment and retention, mentorship, work-life balance, etc.

Broadly, understand that this challenge won't just go away on its own.



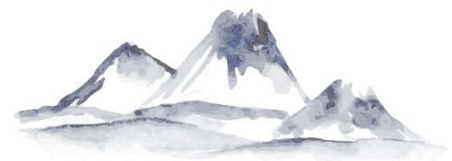
What Can Policy Makers Do About It?

- Provide stability and continuity to existing education and training infrastructure.
- Pay attention to workforce, economic, and demographic data (to help avoid making changes unlikely to make a difference).
- Consider making it easier for trained and experienced people to work in Alaska (reciprocity of licensing, telework, etc.).



And Workforce Development Leaders?

- Help bring underutilized potential workers into the mix (veterans, seniors, people with disabilities, under-represented genders, youth, the formerly incarcerated, etc.).
- Communicate better/more to youth and career changers as they're considering education/training opportunities.



If All You Remember is This ...

There is little doubt that this unusual and big imbalance between employment openings and the number of trained/qualified/willing applicants is going to be with us for a while.



Questions and Comments

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