

West Virginia Economic Outlook

John Deskins, Ph.D.

**West Virginia Legislature
January 2026**

Bureau of Business & Economic Research
John Chambers College of Business & Economics
West Virginia University
www.be.wvu.edu/bber

Copyright ©2026 by WVU Research Corporation

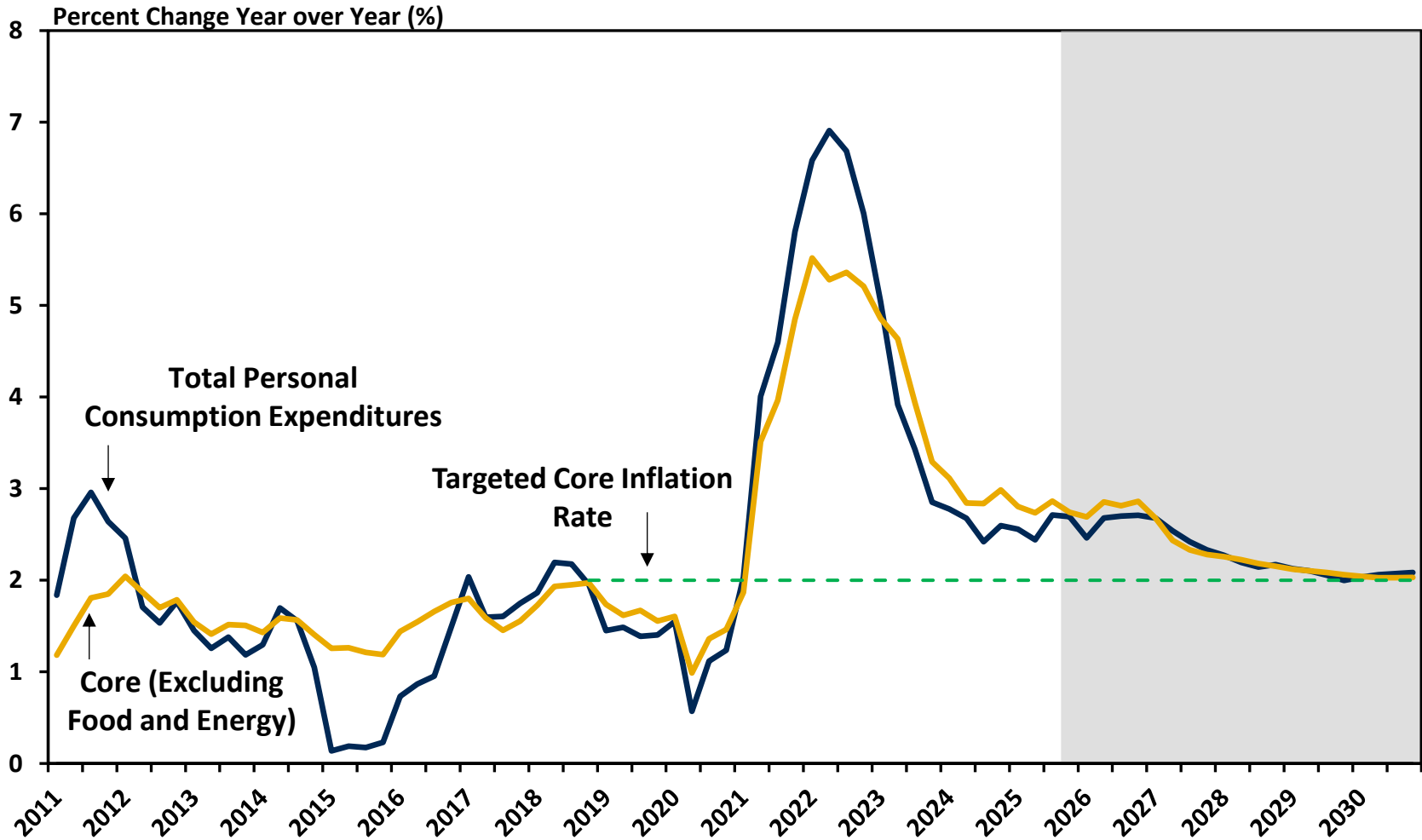
Big Picture...

- Continued growth is expected in the nation, albeit slower than average.
- Uncertainty around tariff policy, inflation, and interest rates still exists, but has diminished significantly.
- West Virginia is expected to grow slightly; strong growth in some regions.
- Long-term challenges remain.
- Opportunities exist.
- Successes are too concentrated geographically and can be masked in statewide figures.

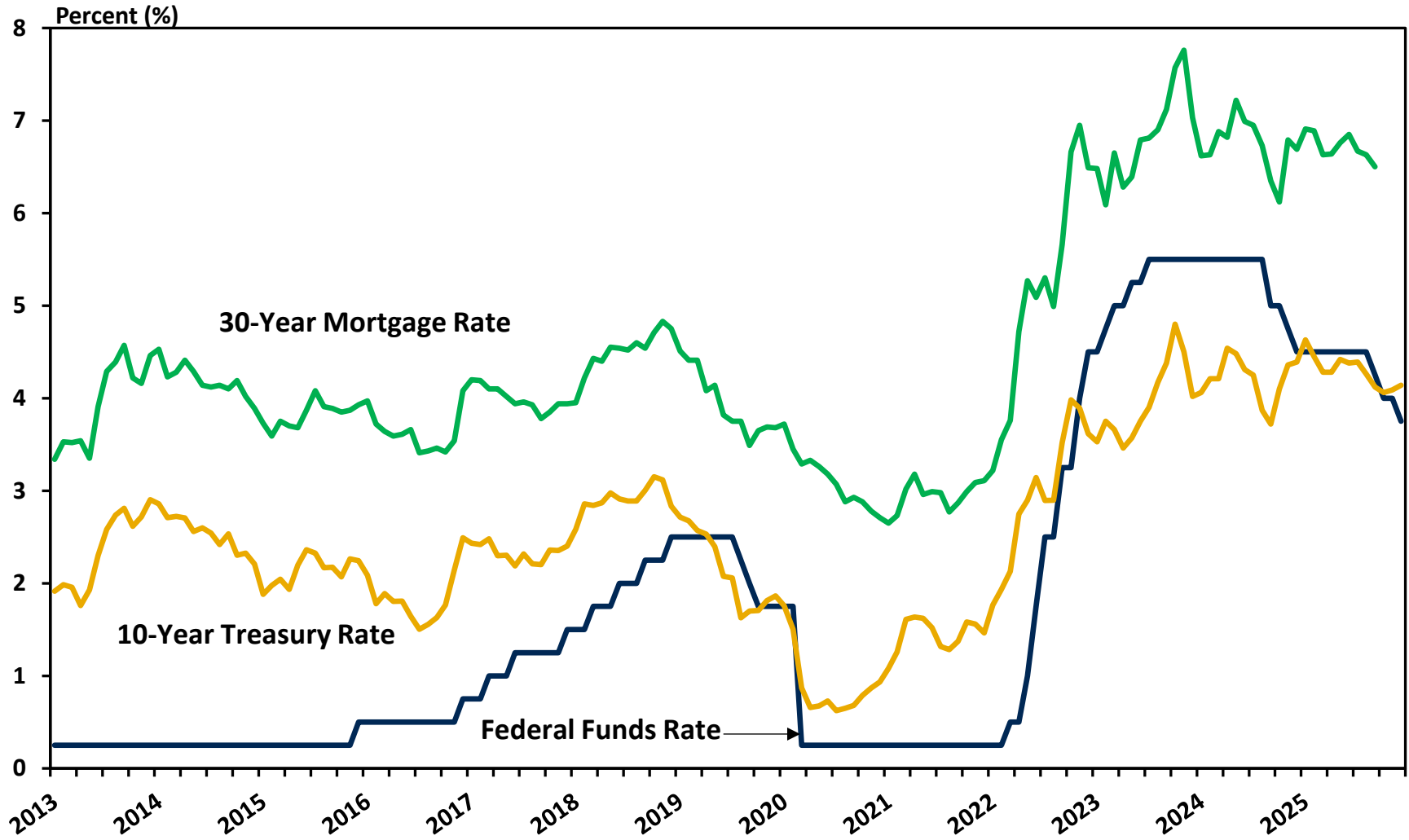
National Economic Conditions:

Context for West Virginia

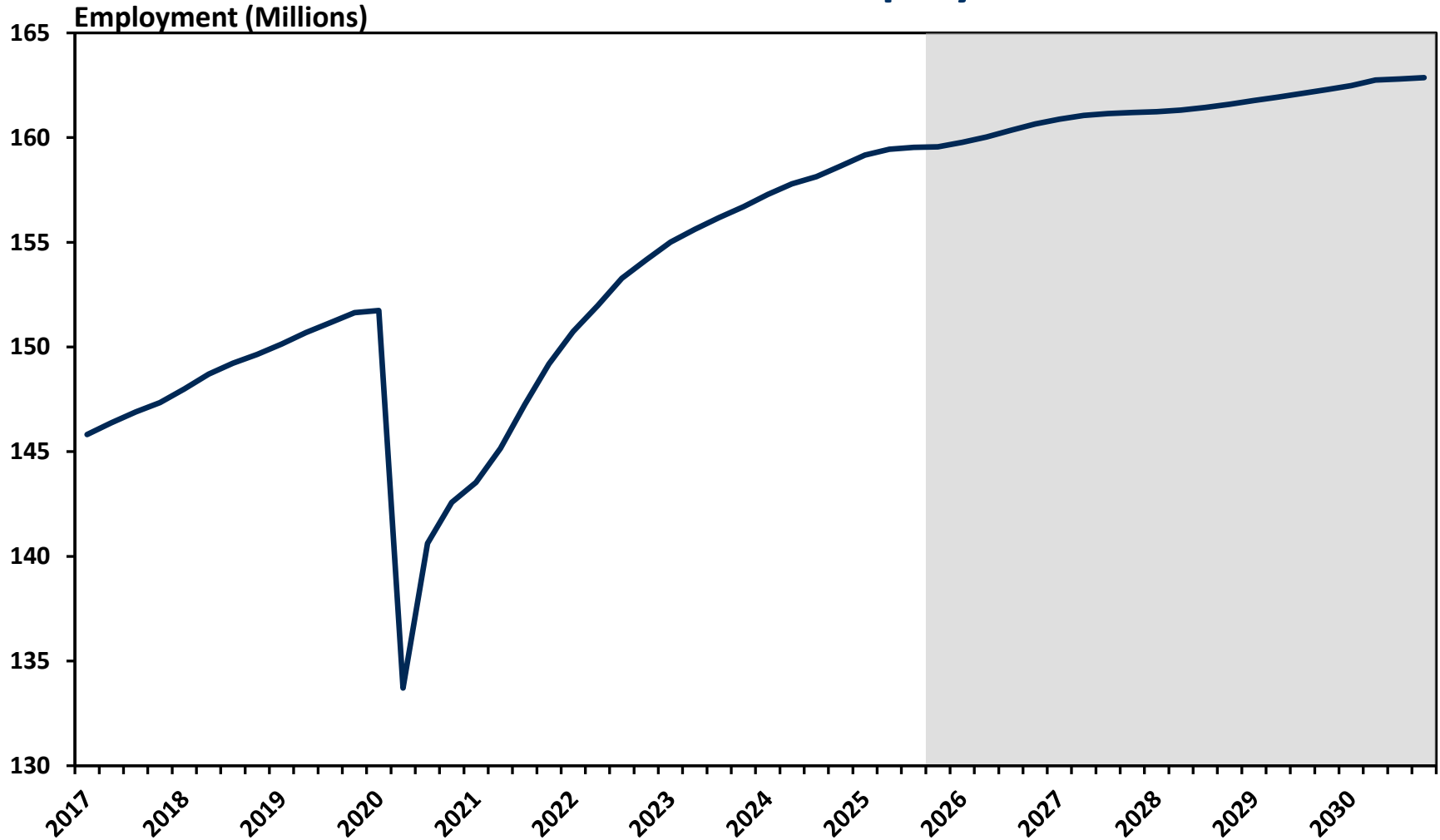
United States Inflation Rates



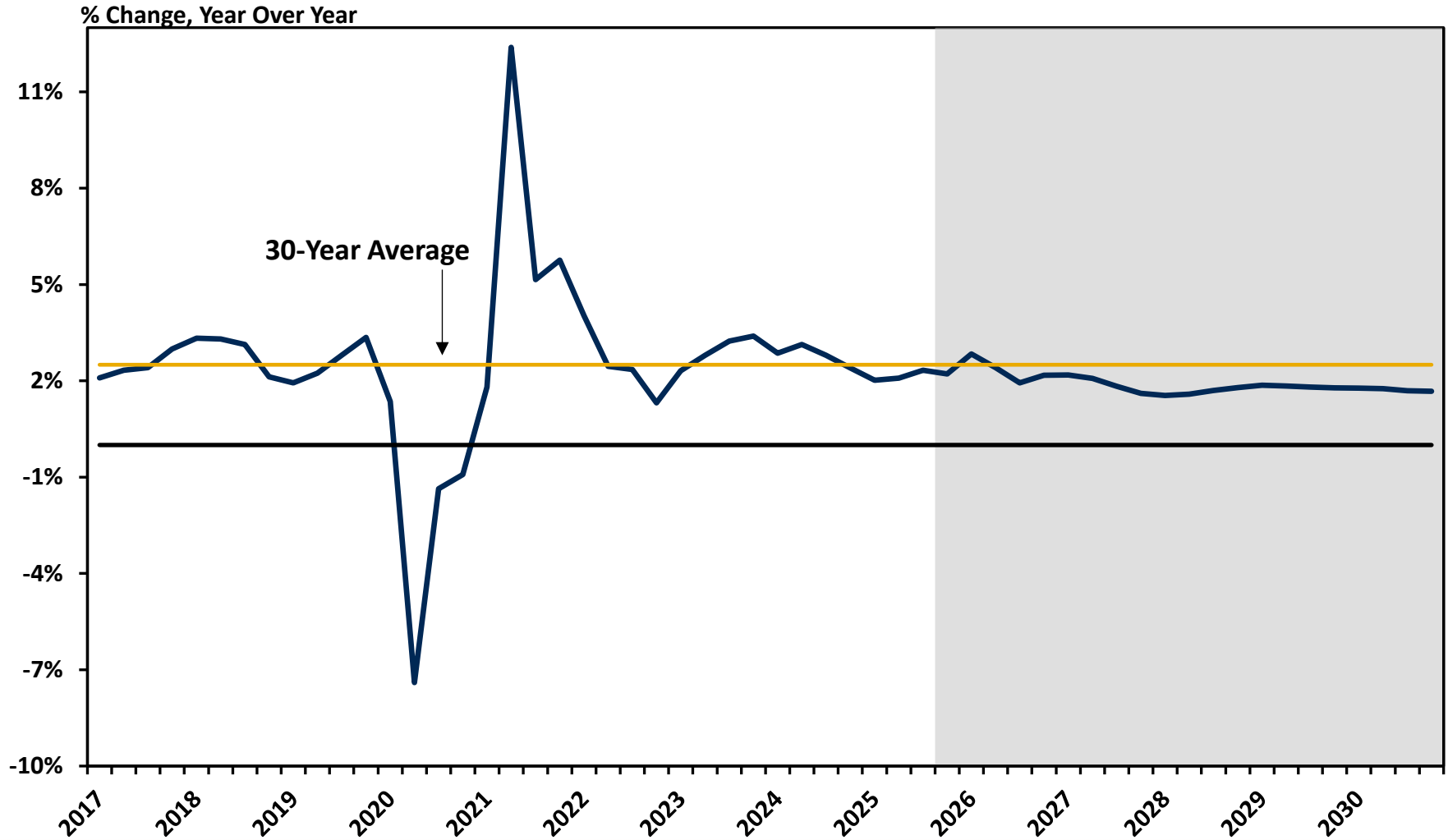
Select United States Interest Rates



United States Total Employment

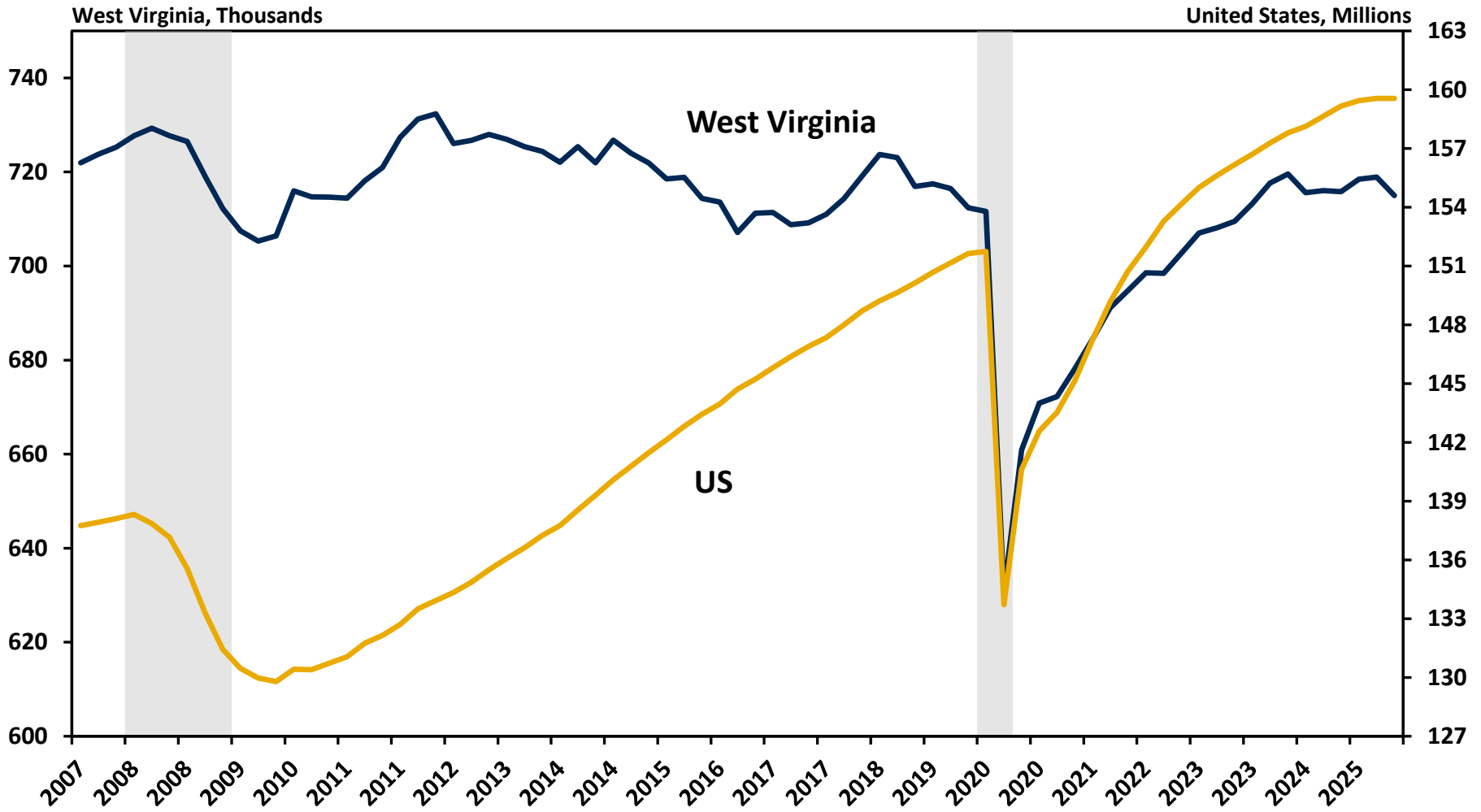


United States Real GDP

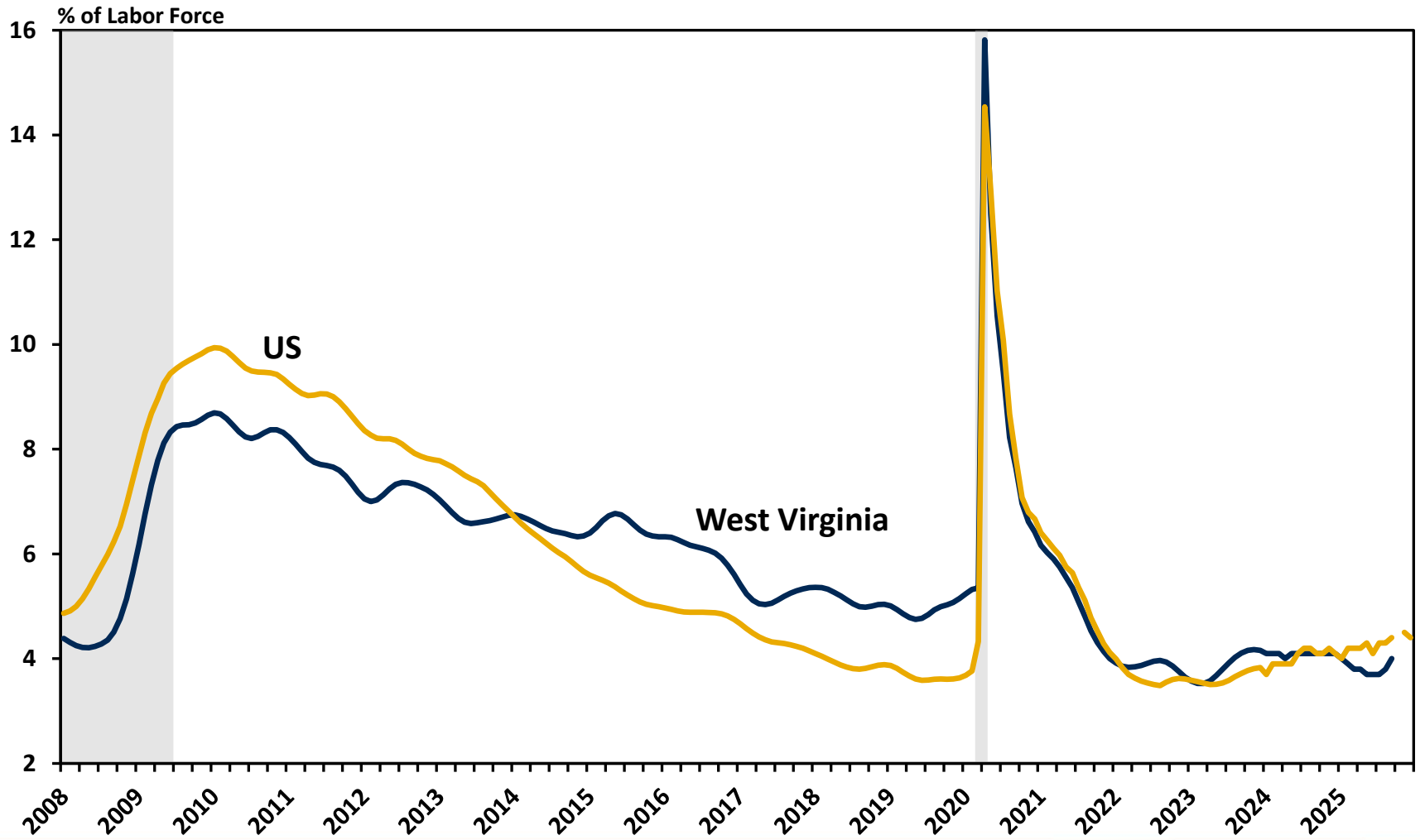


Understanding Our State...

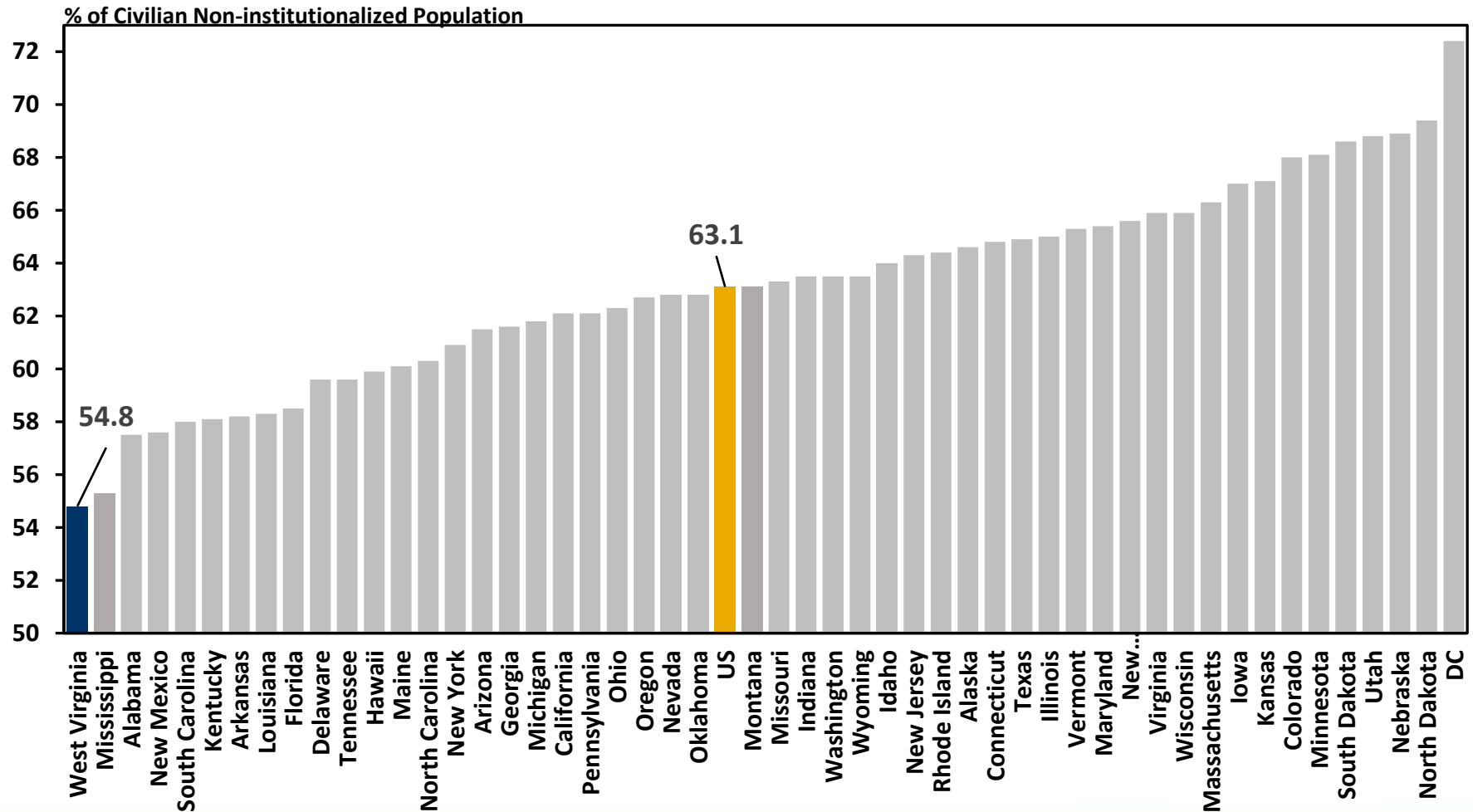
West Virginia Total Employment



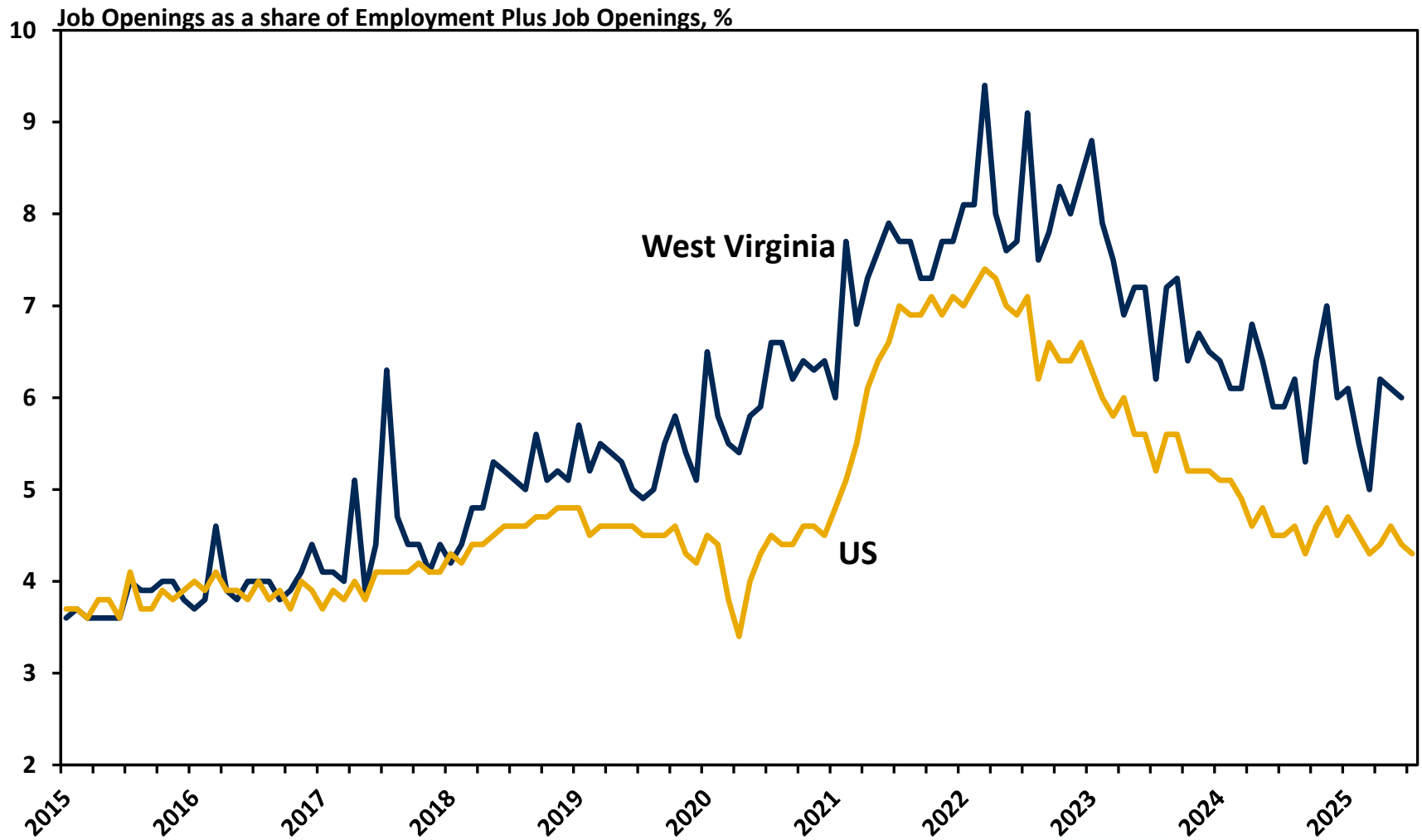
Unemployment Rate



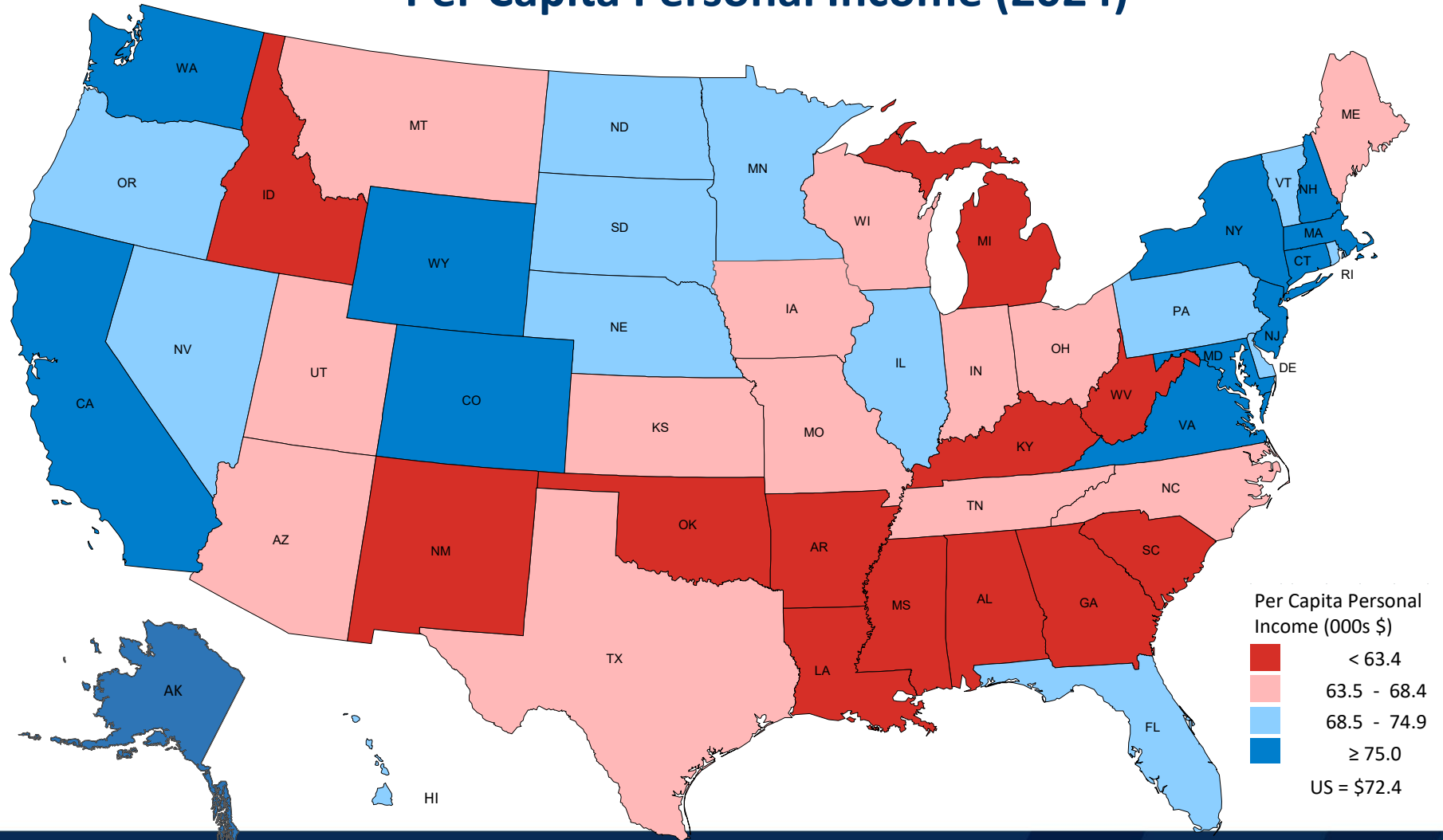
Labor Force Participation by State (2024)



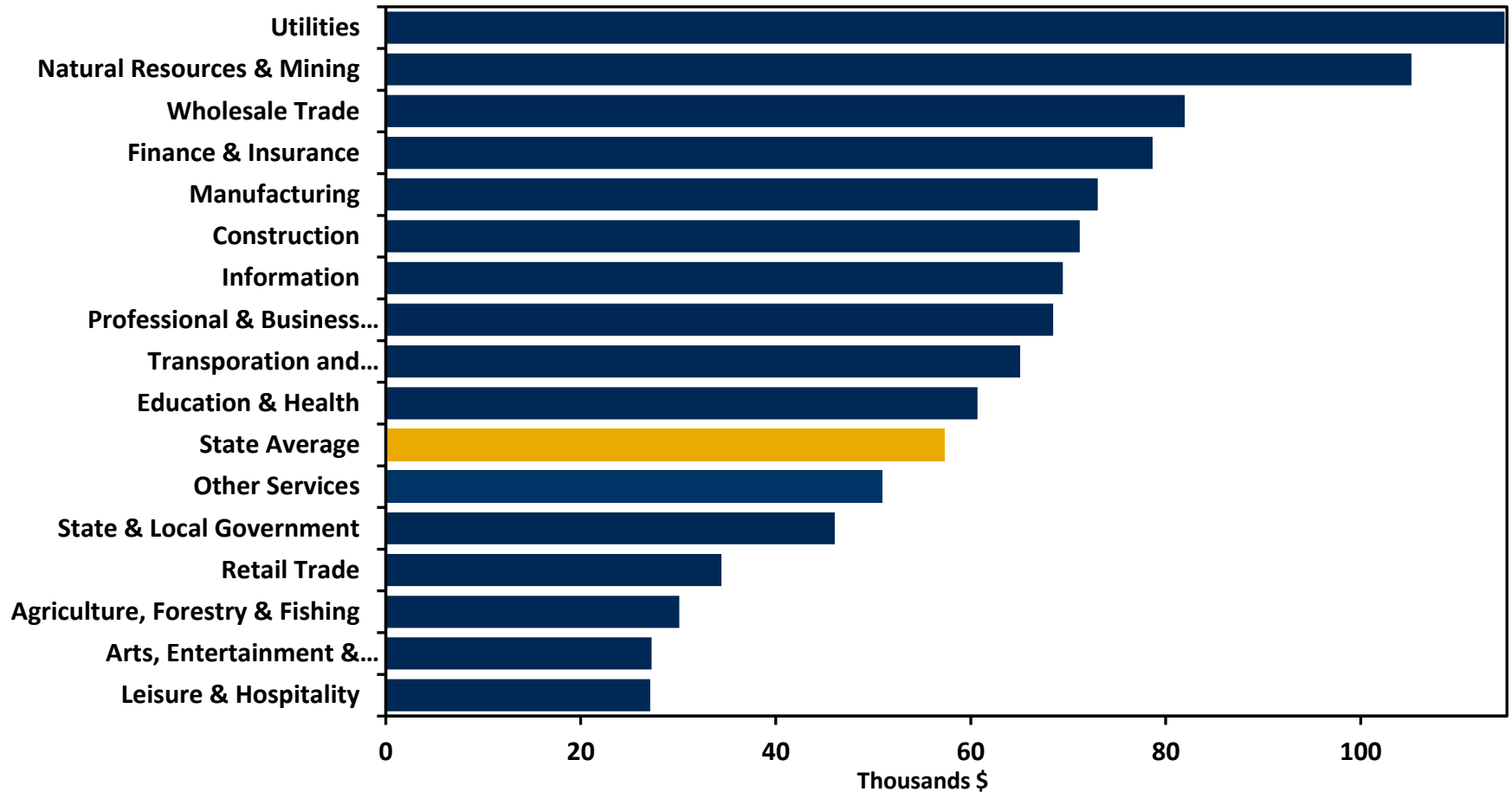
Job Openings Rate



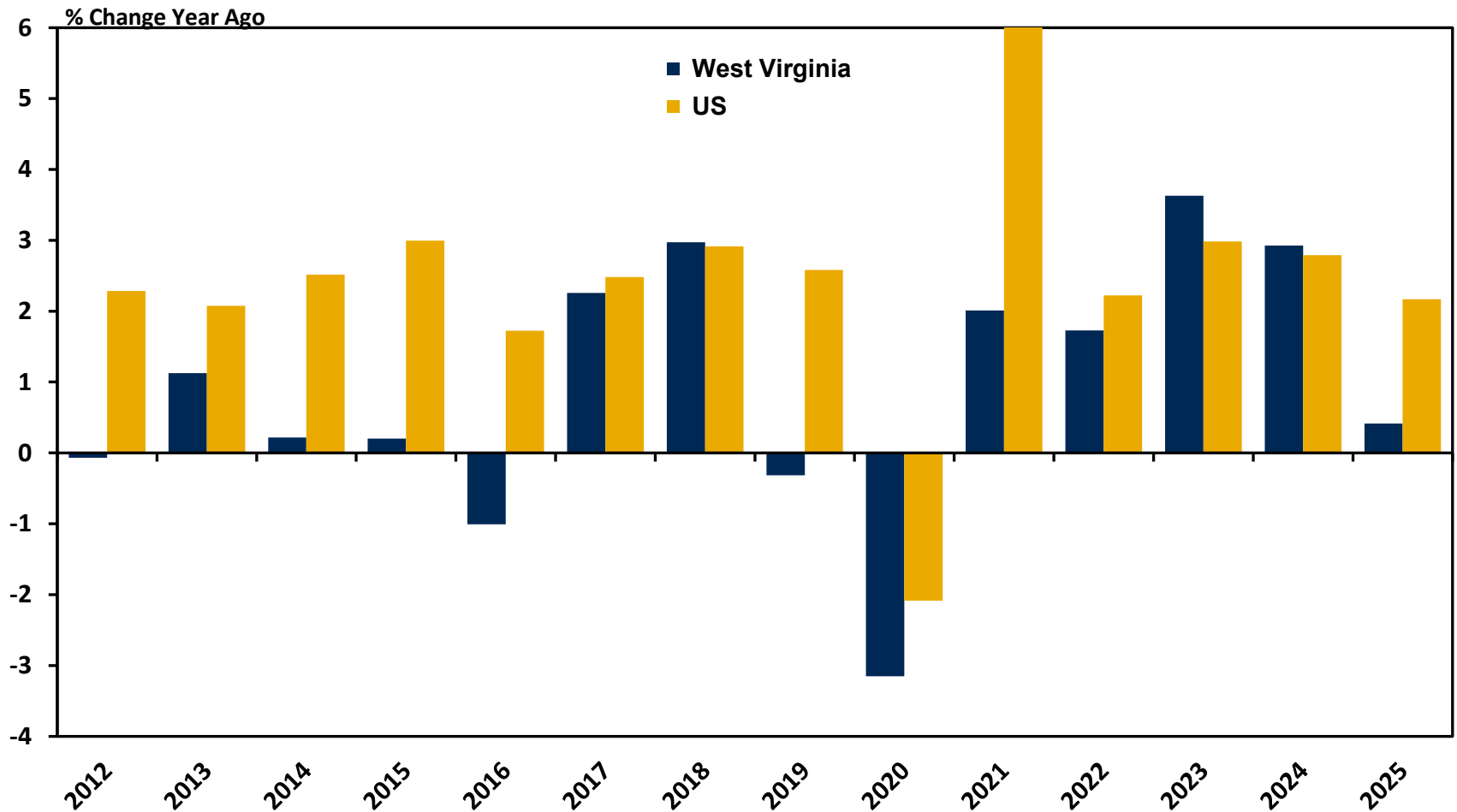
Per Capita Personal Income (2024)



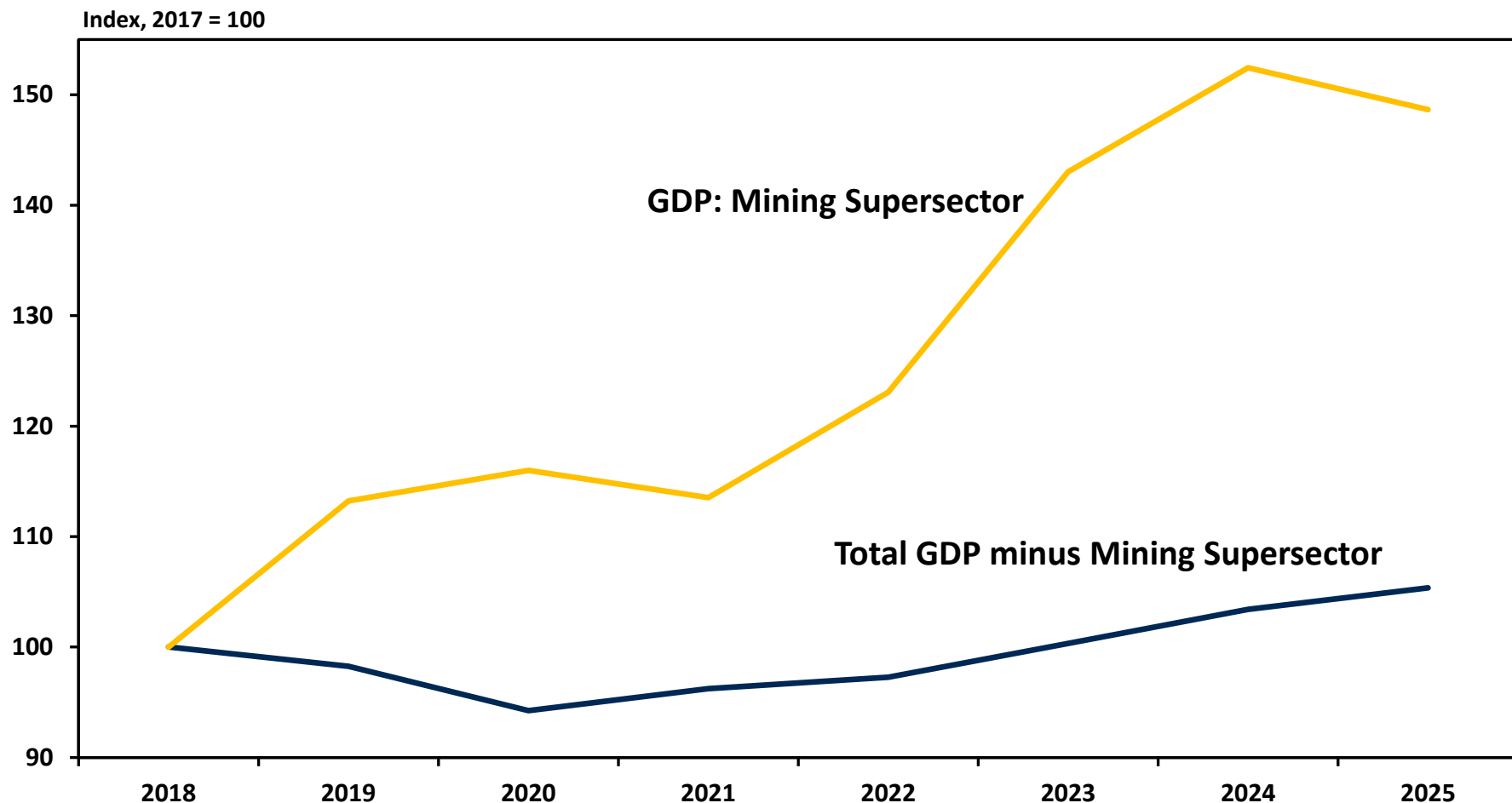
Average Annual Salary by Sector (2024)



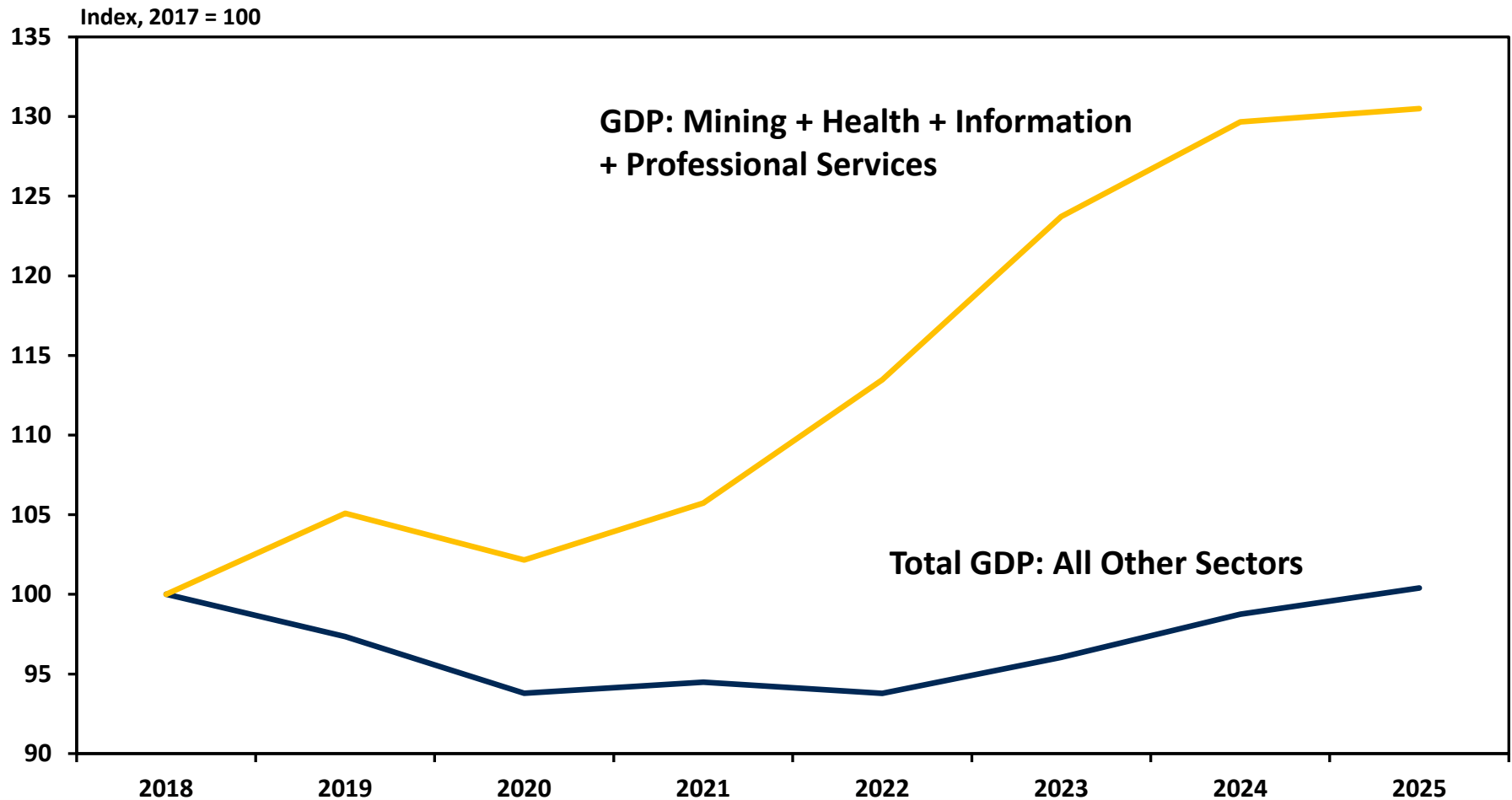
Real Gross Domestic Product Growth



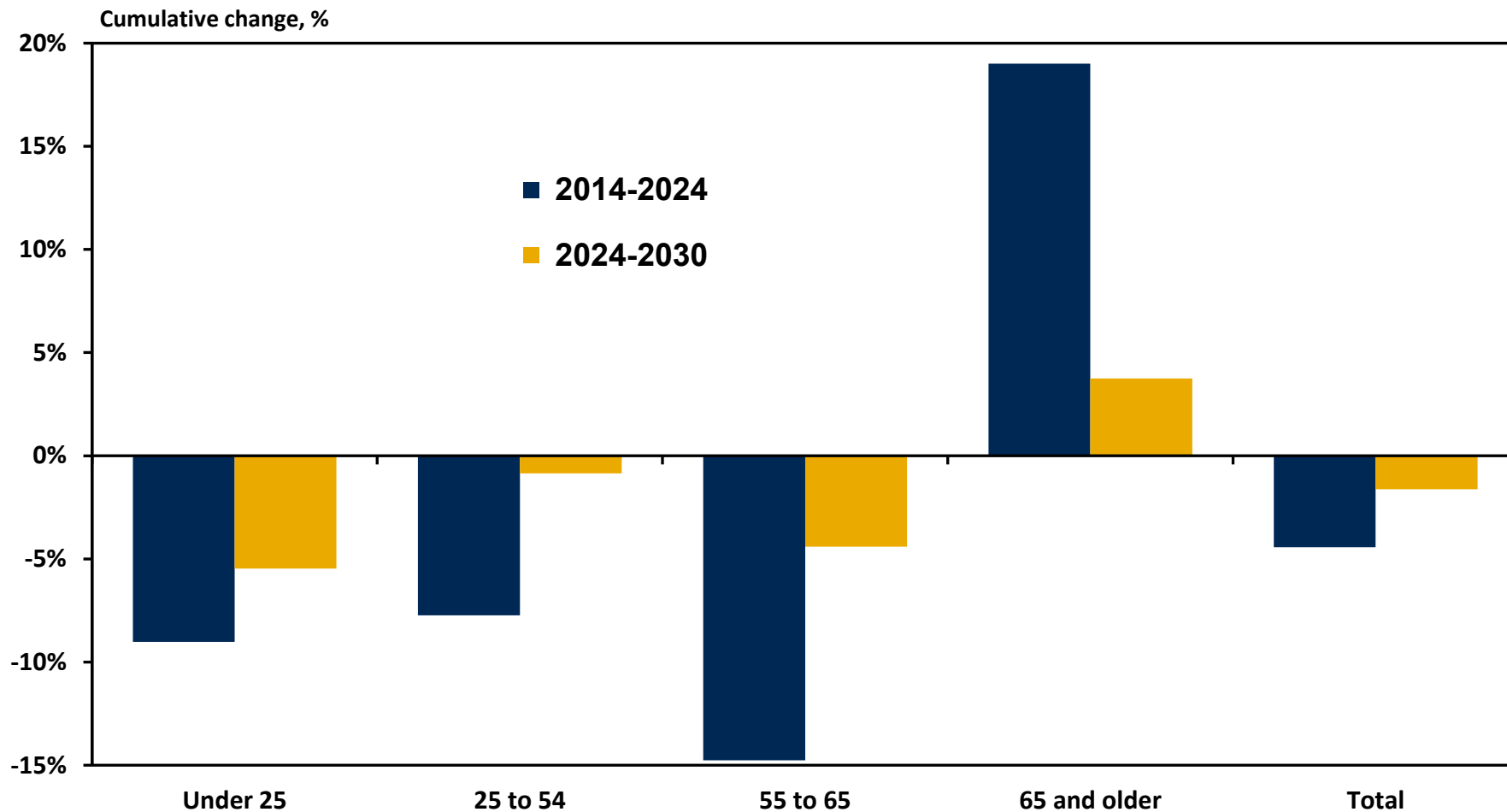
Real GDP Growth – Coal & Gas v. Other Sectors



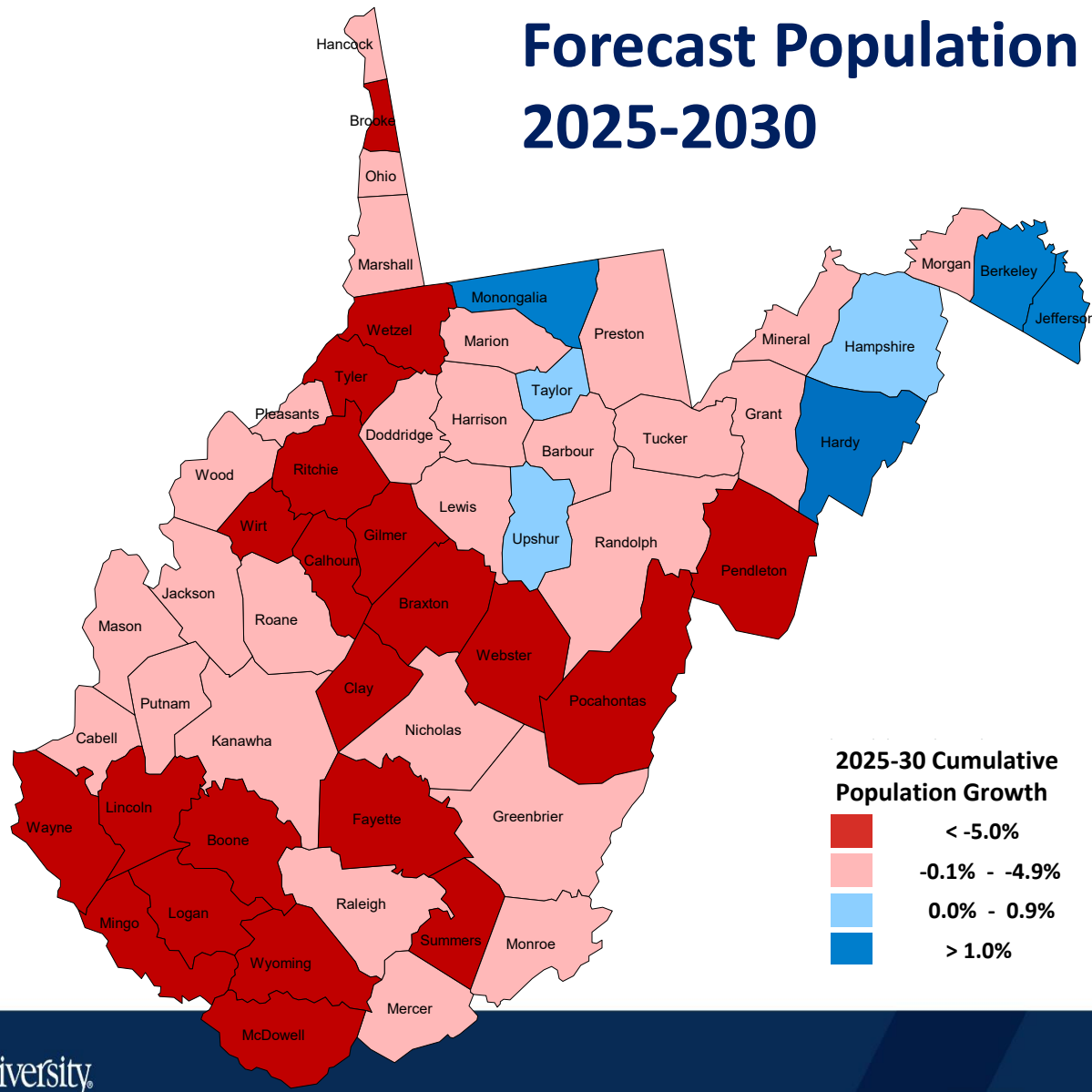
Real GDP Growth – Select Sectors



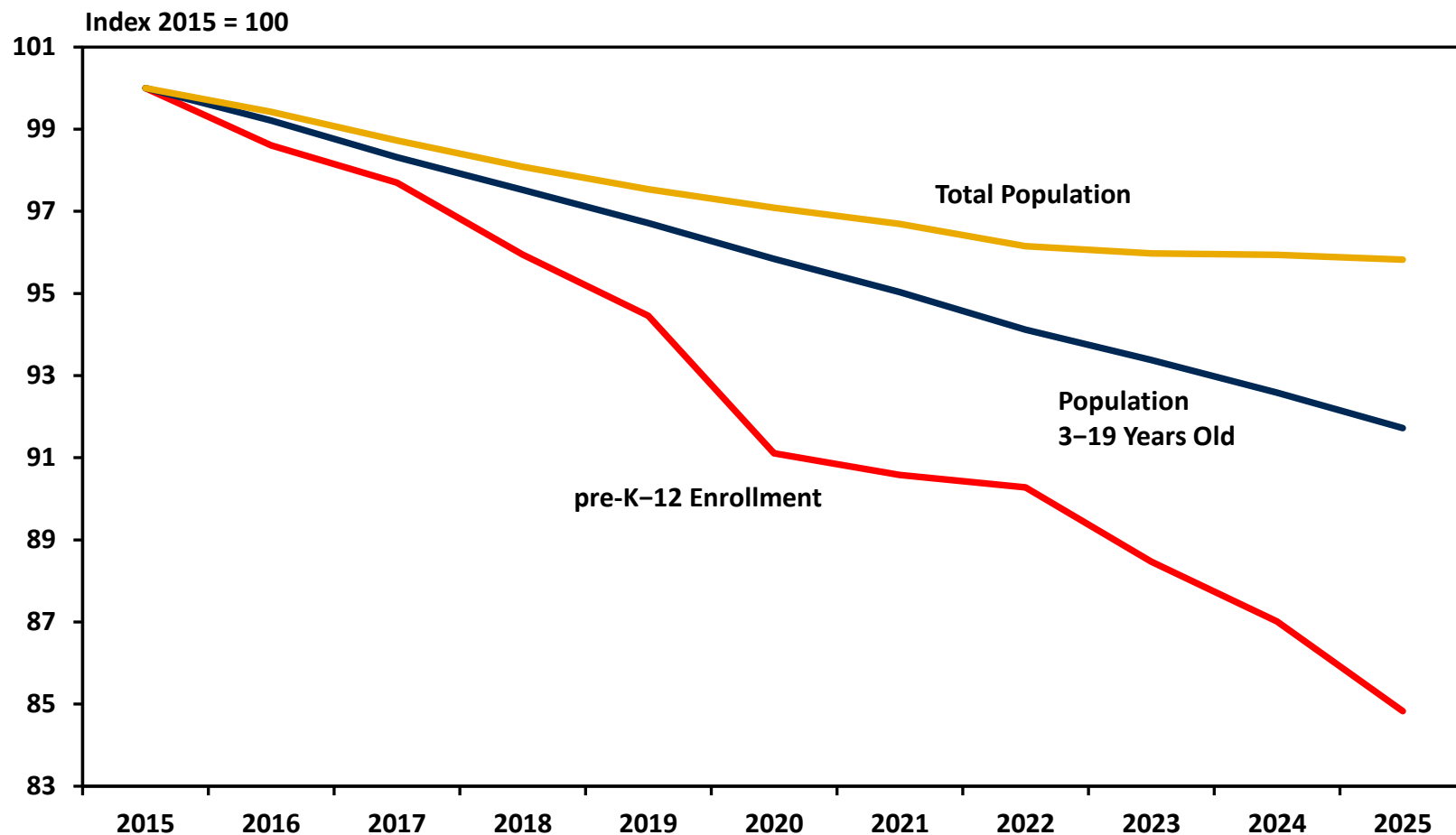
West Virginia Population Change by Age Group



Forecast Population Growth, 2025-2030



Population and Pre-K-12 Enrollment, West Virginia

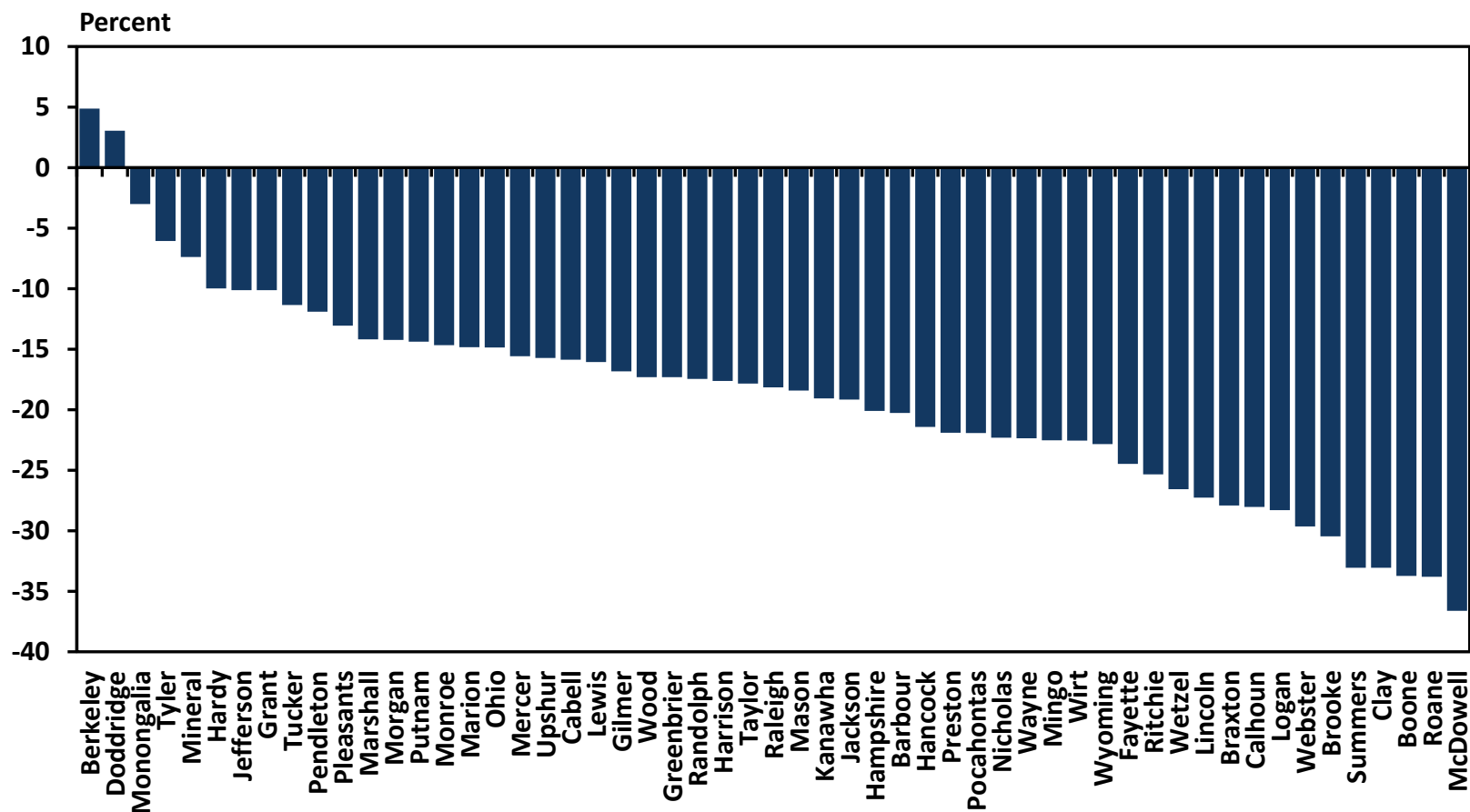


West Virginia University

JOHN CHAMBERS COLLEGE OF
BUSINESS AND ECONOMICS

Bureau of Business and
Economic Research

FY2016–2026 Change in Pre-K–12 Enrollment by County

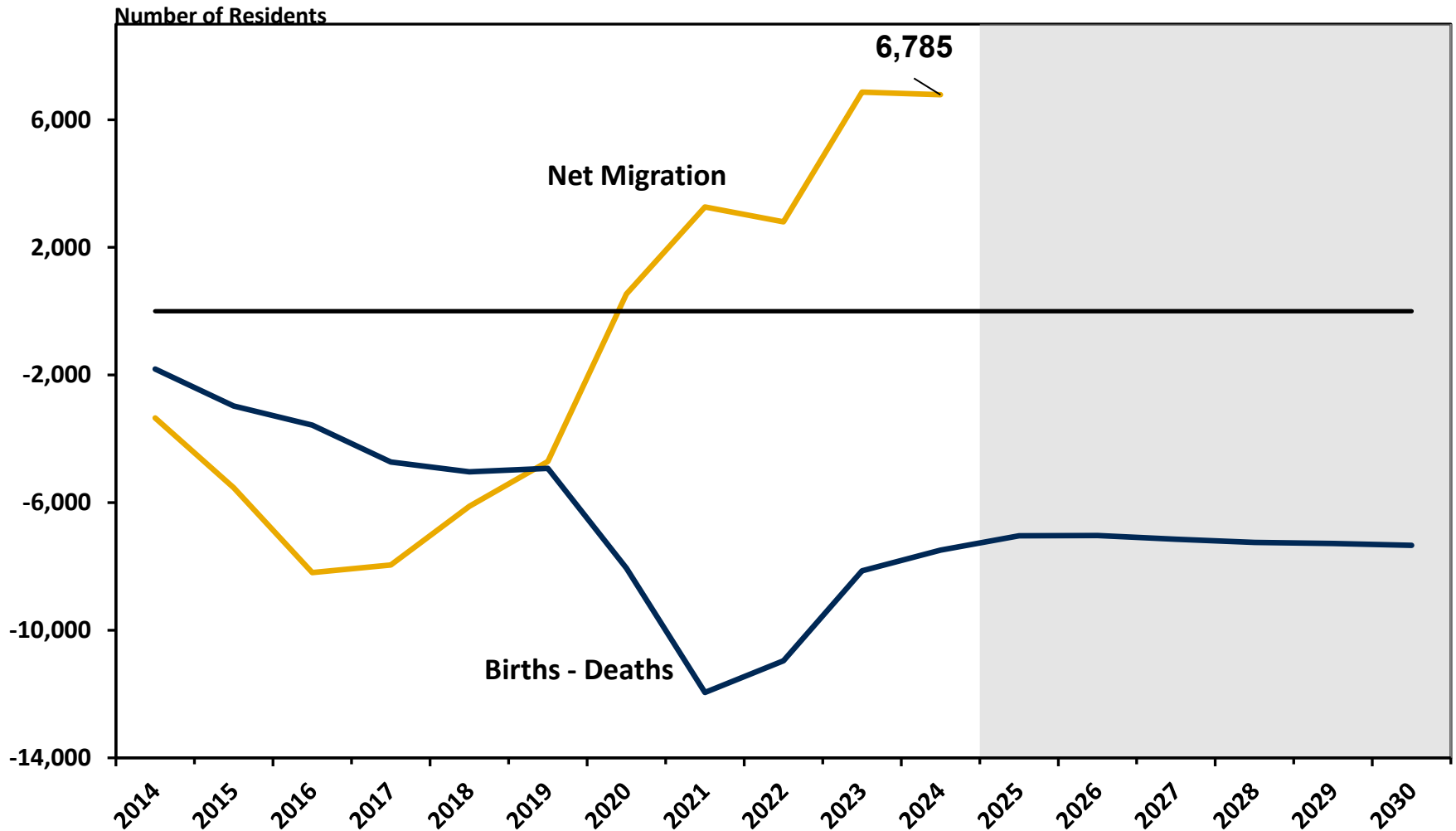


West Virginia University

JOHN CHAMBERS COLLEGE OF
BUSINESS AND ECONOMICS

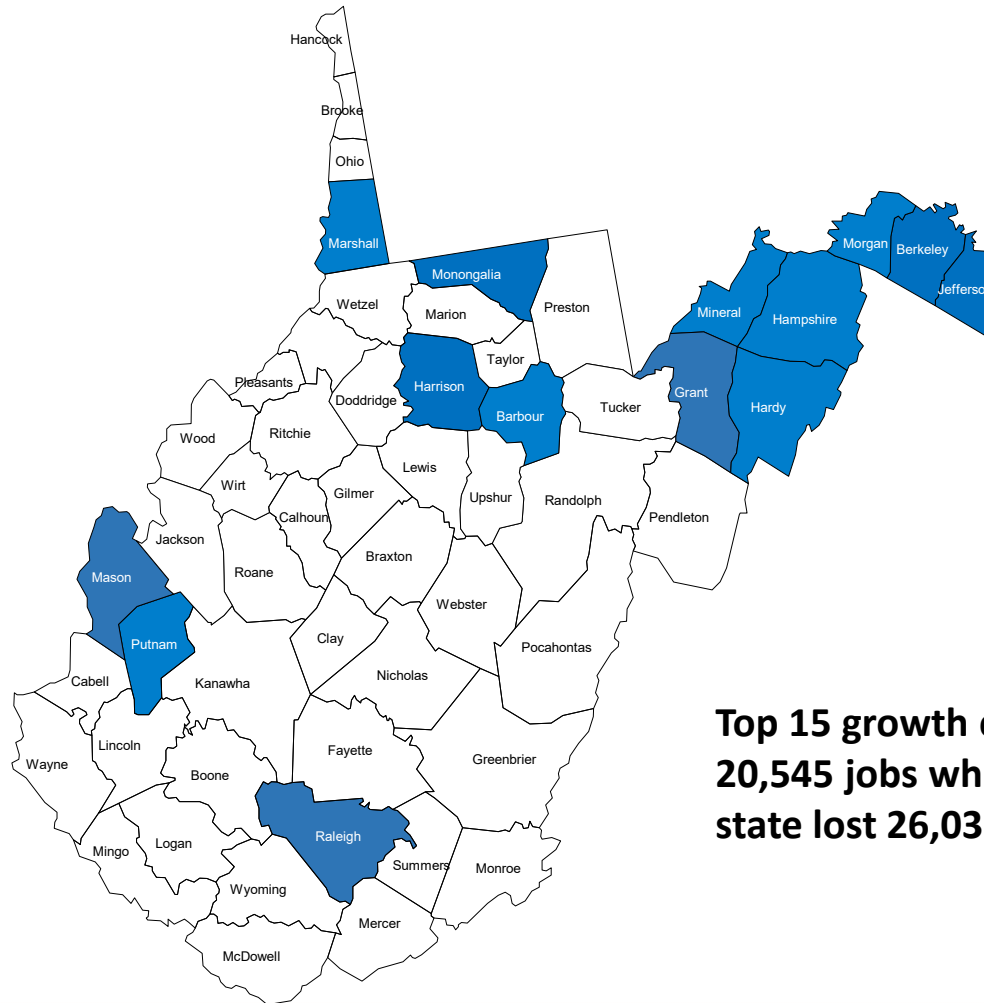
Bureau of Business and
Economic Research

Components of Population Change



Diverse Regional Outcomes Across West Virginia...

Top 15 Growth Counties, 2015 - 2025



**Top 15 growth counties added
20,545 jobs while balance of
state lost 26,036 jobs**

Cumulative Employment 2015-2025

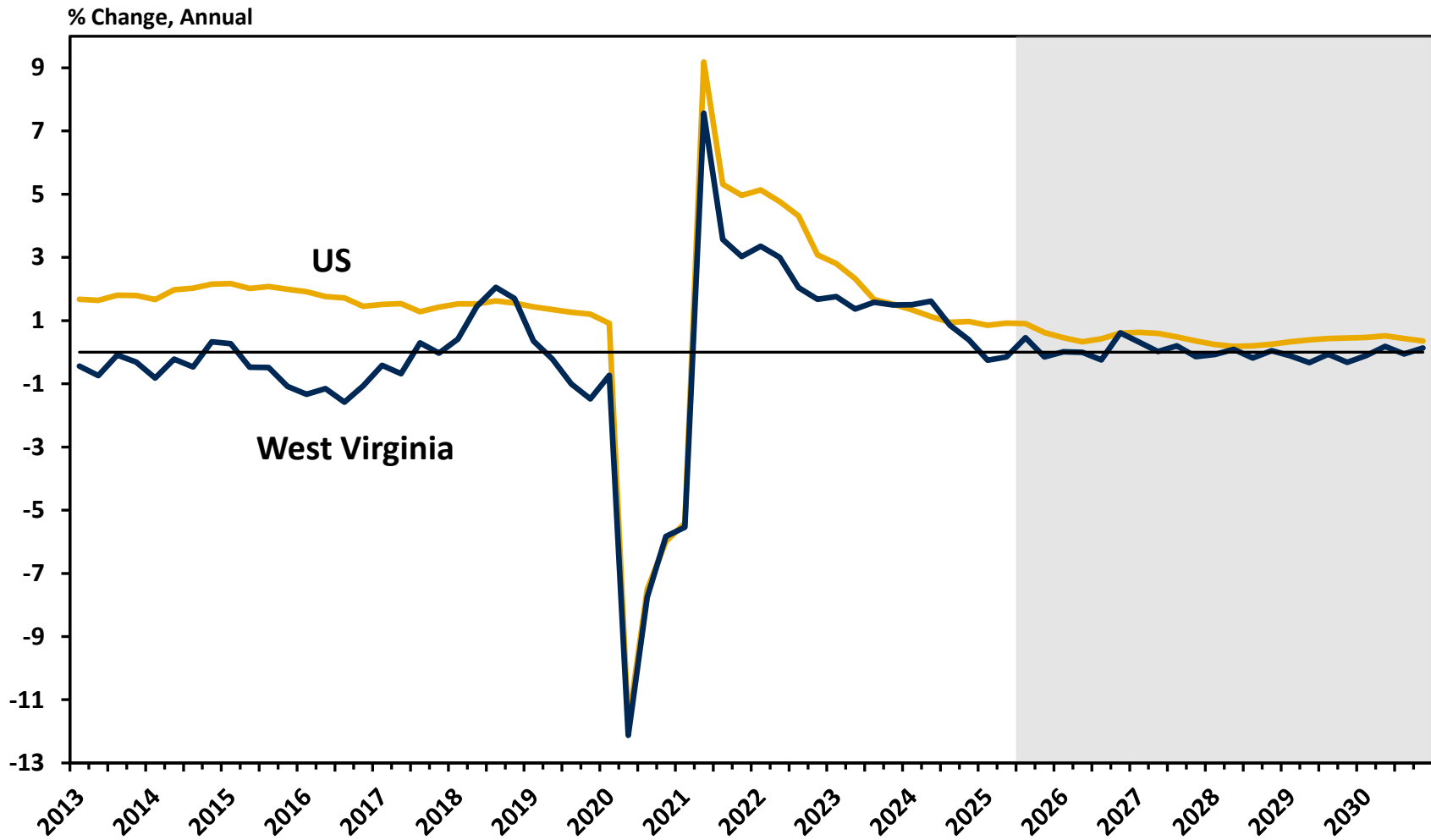
2015-25 Cumulative Employment Growth

- ≤ -10.0%
- 0.1% - -9.9%
- 0.1% - 4.9%
- ≥ 5.0%

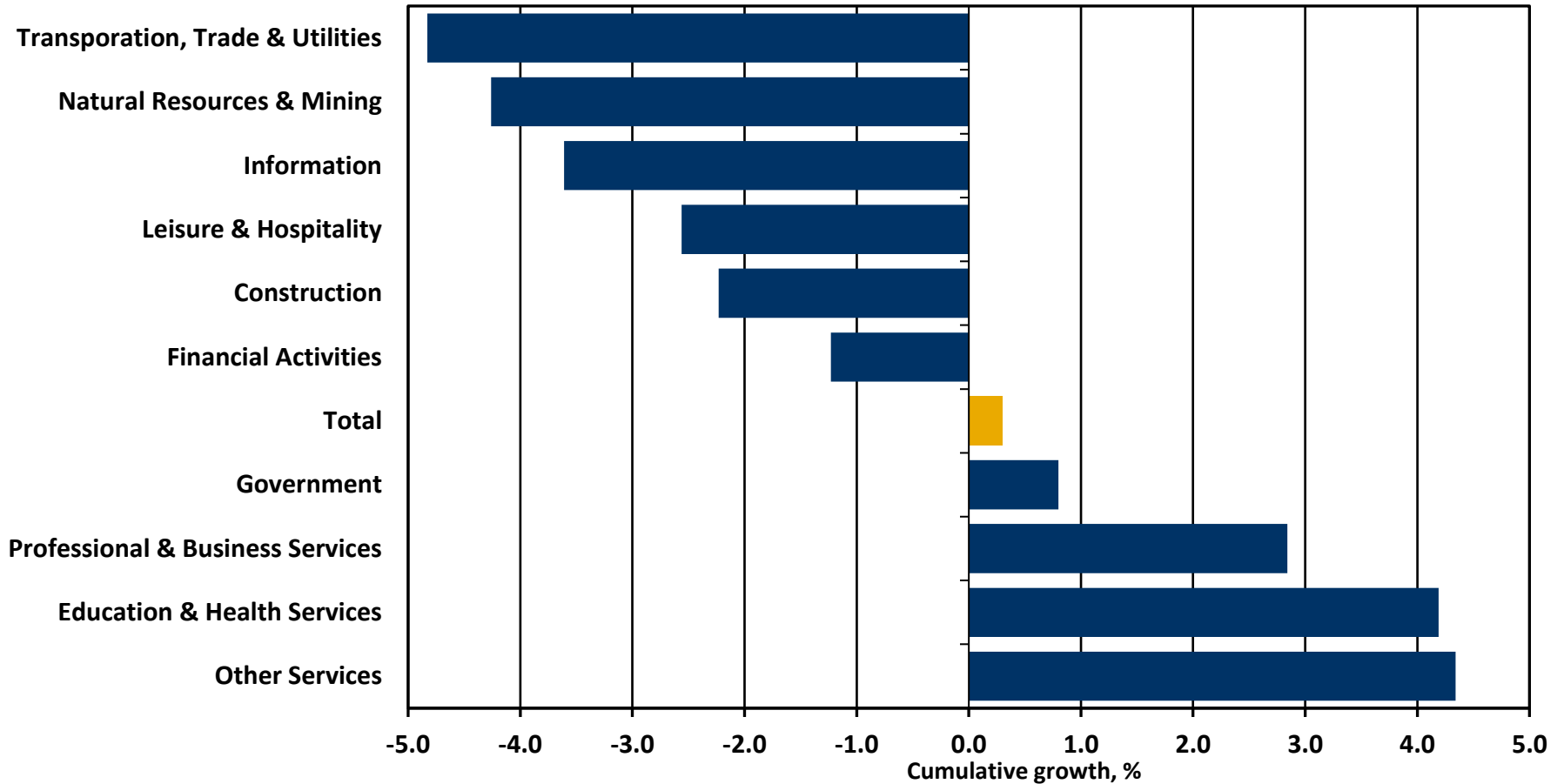
Counties shown on the map include: Hancock, Brooke, Ohio, Marshall, Monongalia, Morgan, Berkeley, Jefferson, Hampshire, Mineral, Preston, Taylor, Harrison, Barbour, Tucker, Grant, Hardy, Pendleton, Randolph, Upshur, Lewis, Gilmer, Calhoun, Wirt, Ritchie, Pleasants, Tyler, Wetzel, Marion, Doddridge, Wood, Mason, Jackson, Roane, Braxton, Webster, Nicholas, Clay, Pocahontas, Greenbrier, Fayette, Boone, Lincoln, Cabell, Wayne, Mingo, Logan, Raleigh, Summers, Monroe, Mercer, McDowell, and Wyoming.

Where Do We Go From Here?

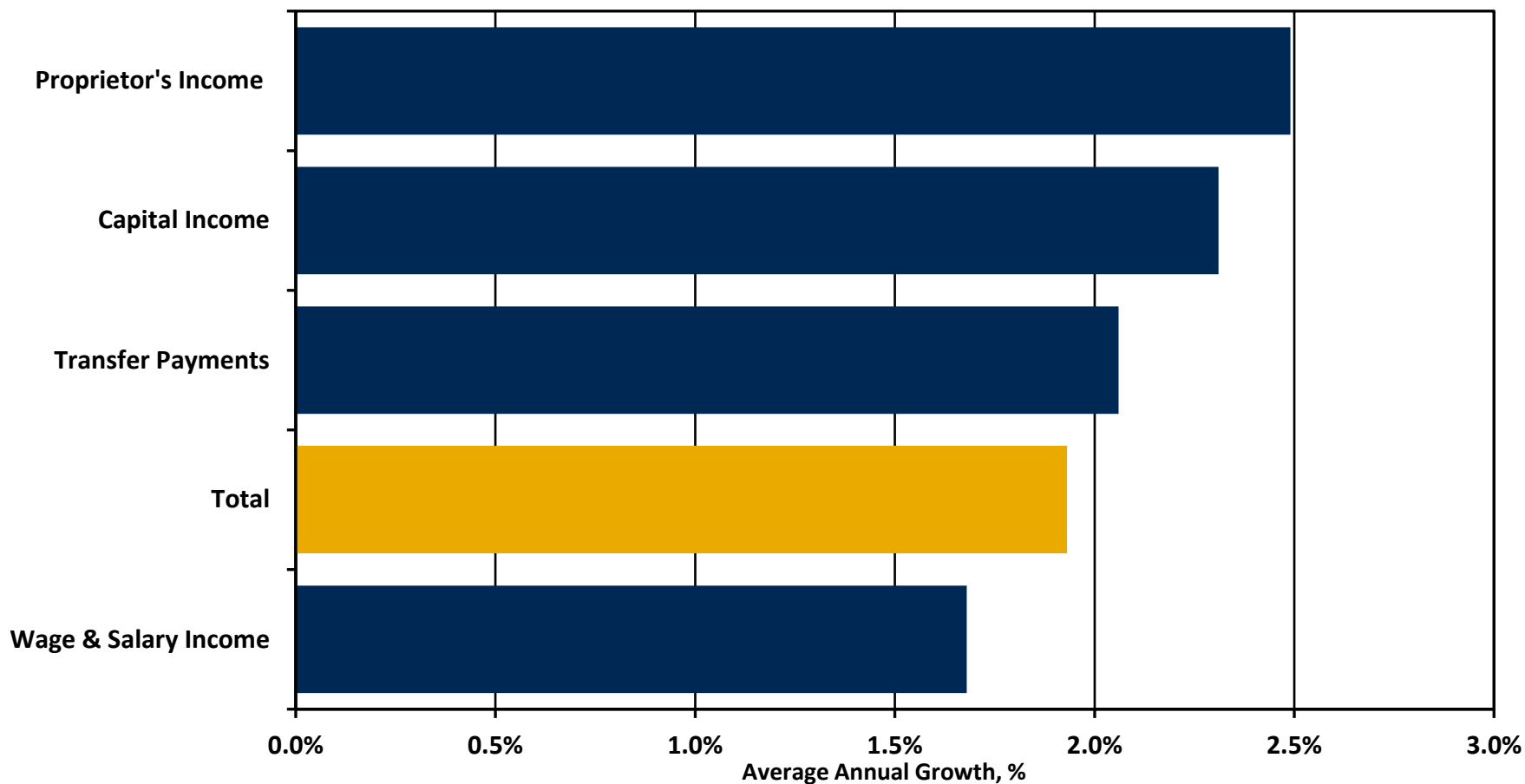
Employment Growth Forecast



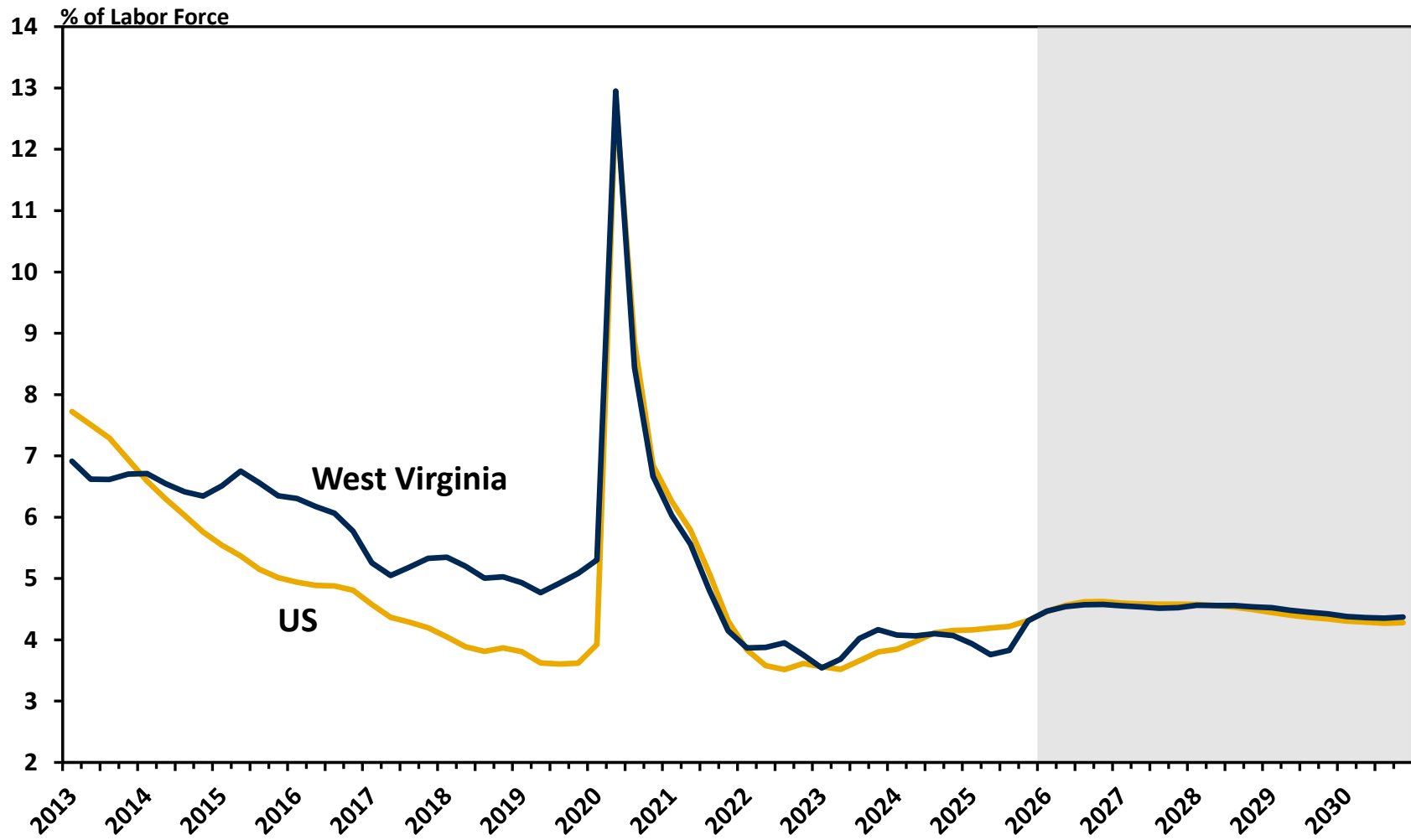
West Virginia Employment Growth Forecast by Sector, 2025-2030



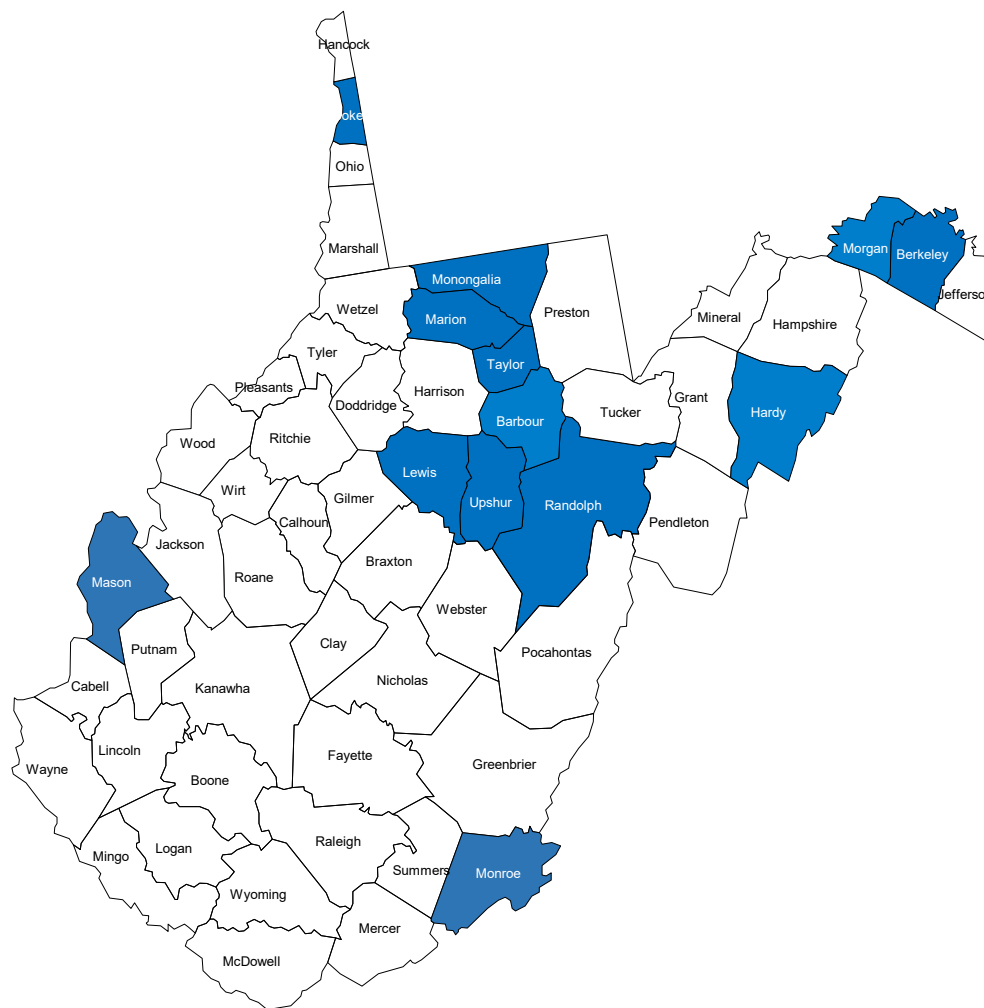
Forecast Growth by Source of Real Personal Income, 2025-2030



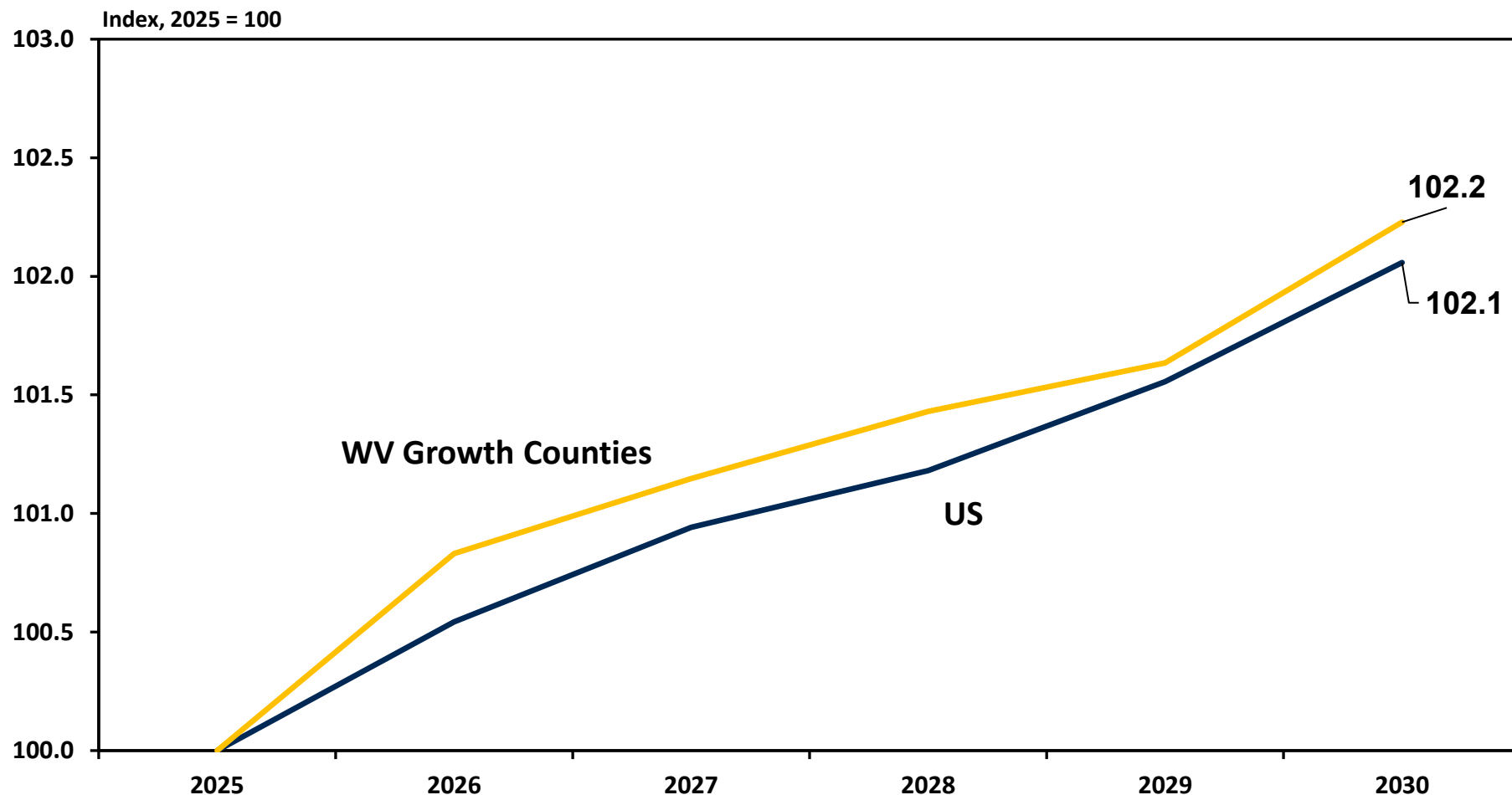
Unemployment Rate Forecast



Expected Growth for Just These Counties?



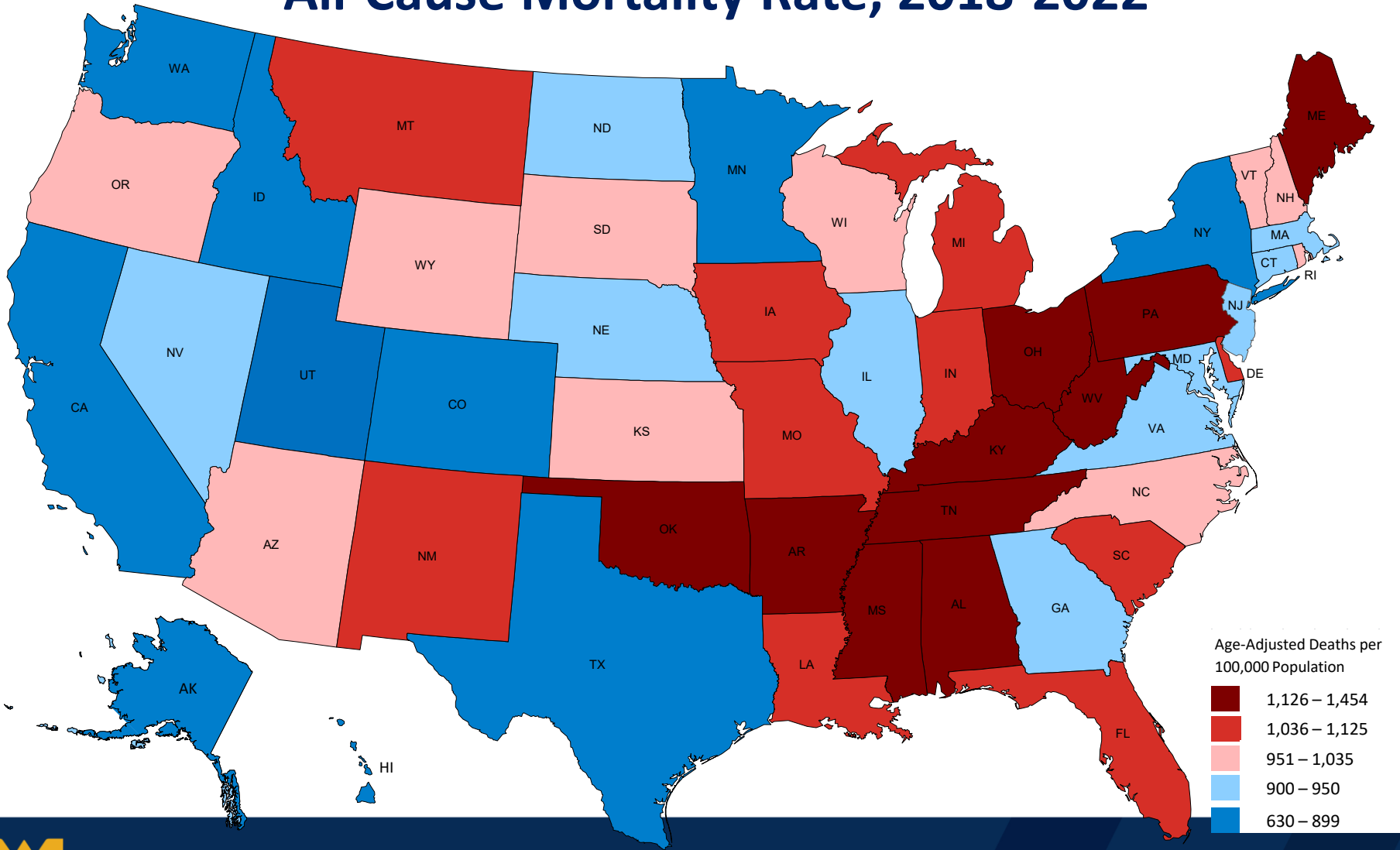
Forecast Employment Growth – Only “Growth” Counties



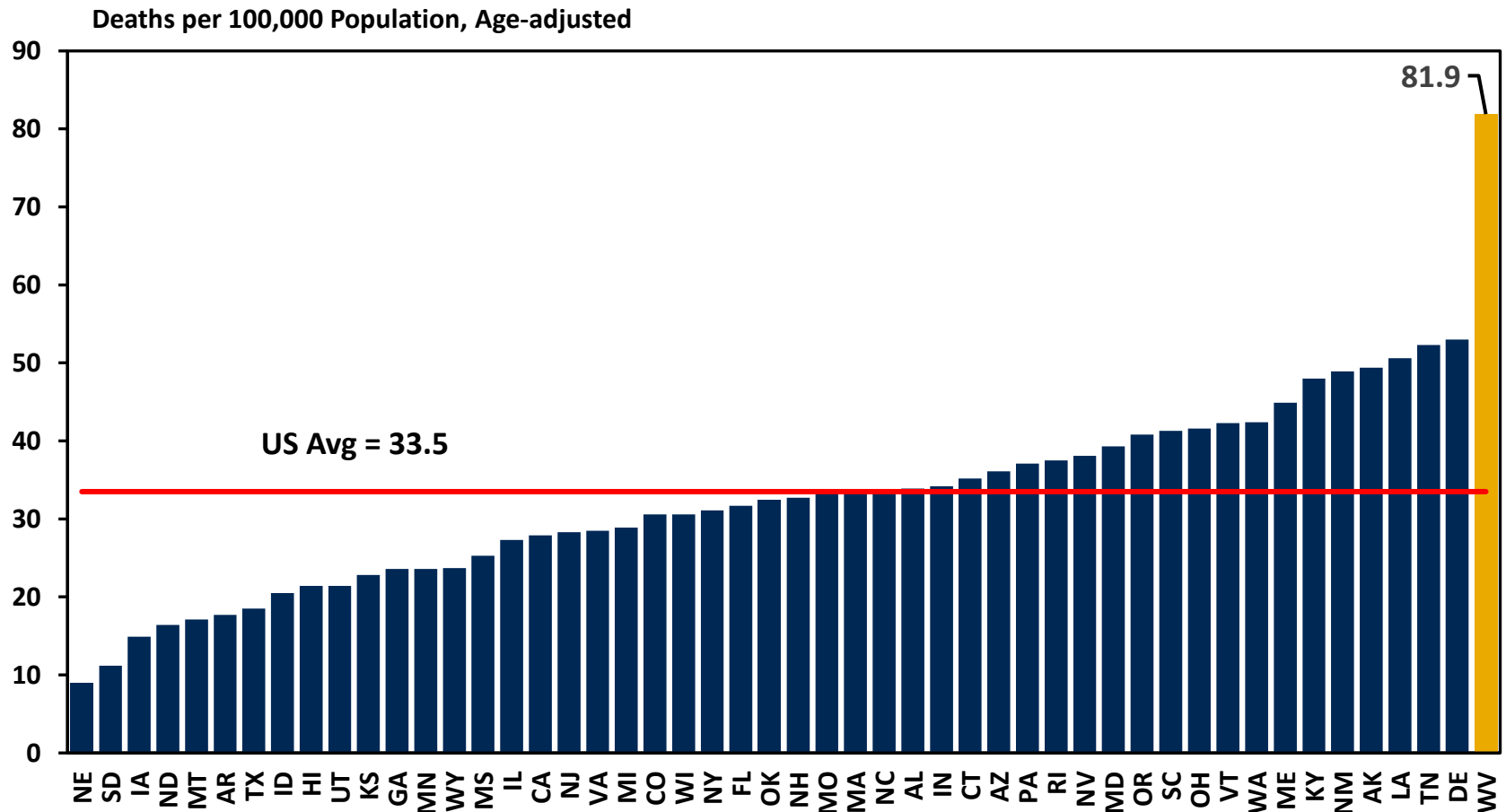
Economic Development Priority

Human Capital

All-Cause Mortality Rate, 2018-2022



Drug Overdose Mortality Rate, 2023



Economic Development in Our State

Breaking The Vicious Cycle...

- Lack of Industrial Diversification →
- Shock to Dominant Industry →
- Out-Migration →
- Lose Younger, Healthier, Better Educated/Trained →
- Drug Abuse →
- Area is Now *Less Attractive* to New Development →
- Conditions Worsen
- A New Spark?

Some Wins from Recent Years...

- Select Jobs Created Through WV Dept. of Econ. Development
 - Nucor, 800 new jobs, Mason
 - FORM Energy, 750 new jobs, Hancock
 - Fidelis Infrastructure, 350 new jobs, Mason
 - Triton International, 260 new jobs, Berkeley
 - LG Nova, 275 new jobs, Mon/Cabell/Mercer
 - OBT Bluefield, 150 new jobs, Mercer
 - Owens & Minor, 125 new jobs, Monongalia
 - Gestamp, 120 new jobs, Kanawha

The Next Stage of Economic Development...

- Traditional Focus on “Footloose” Firms
- Far Fewer Jobs Are “Attractable” Today
- Heavy Service-Oriented Economy
- Physical Location is Less Important
- Traditional Efforts to Attract Large Manufacturers are Less Effective...
 - With Some Exceptions

The Next Stage of Economic Development...

- People Move to Where They Want to Live...
 - Jobs Follow
- Make West Virginia a Place People Want to Live
- Quality of Life Amenities

