

The Divide

Small towns in Texas had always been defined by quiet roads, familiar faces, and the kind of stillness that made outsiders slow down without knowing why. But lately, that stillness has been disturbed by something new, the data center boom. Companies with deep pockets and deeper ambitions were hunting for wide-open land, easy access to transmission lines, and the promise of fresh water. And everywhere they looked, rural Texas fit the bill.

In one such town, two longtime friends found themselves standing on opposite sides of a widening fault line.

Charlie had pumped oil out of the ground for decades; his livelihood was tied to the land and the rhythm of the community. He was dead-set against the proposed 14-building data center complex. To him, it was a threat wrapped in corporate branding, a water-hungry, power-draining beast that would bring noise, traffic and strangers into a place that had never asked for any of it. His cousin lived barely half a mile from the site, and Charlie feared their property value would crater. He feared the hum of machinery, the glow of lights, the unknown health risks. Mostly, he feared losing the town he knew.

Edward had spent nearly twenty years inside data centers, building them, maintaining them, solving problems most people never saw. He understood the technology, engineering and environmental controls. And he understood the fear, too, but he didn't buy it. Every Facebook post, every angry comment, every rumor Charlie shared felt like the same recycled, AI-generated talking points pulled from a quick internet search. Edward believed the real impact would be far smaller than the townsfolk imagined. And he believed the upside, tax revenue, construction jobs, new opportunities for local trades, mattered.

He didn't live in town full-time, but he owned a home there. He paid taxes. He cared. And he hated being told he didn't. Mostly, he hated seeing his optimism dismissed as worthless.

Charlie saw Edward's support as betrayal. Edward saw Charlie's opposition as paranoia. And with every Facebook post, every text message, every sideways comment at the Whataburger, the divide grew. What had once been friendly debate turned into sharp words and cold silences. The two men who had hunted together, worked together, laughed together now barely spoke without bracing for a fight.

The town felt it too. Families split. Neighbors stopped waving. Church pews filled with tension instead of fellowship. The allure of data centers, the promise of economic growth in places that desperately needed it, had become a wedge driven straight through rural Texas.

One night, sitting alone on his porch, Edward found himself thinking a thought he hadn't dared say aloud: *What if this isn't just about data centers? What if someone, somewhere, wants Americans fighting each other instead of leading the AI revolution?*

It sounded like a conspiracy, and maybe it was. But seeing Charlie, his closest friend in all but blood, become an adversary over something neither man controlled, Edward couldn't shake the feeling that the division was too sharp, too sudden, too familiar.

By the time the first survey stakes went into the ground, Charlie and Edward were barely speaking. The friendship that had survived droughts, downturns, and decades of change was now hanging by a thread.

And in that small Texas town, like so many others, the servers hadn't even arrived yet, but the damage was already done.