May snowstorm cancels softball and swimming!

Economic Outlook and Trends Through March 2026 United States and Colorado

Colorado-based Business and Economic Research, cber.co

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Economic Outlook and Trends

The purpose of this chartbook is to review the outlook and performance of the U.S. and Colorado economies, with an emphasis on the labor market. This analysis focuses on employment from 2019 to current and March 2026 vs March 2025.

In a couple of weeks, the Colorado April 2026 employment data will be available.

We hope for the best in the coming months! That includes cancelled softball games and swimming, if that is what it takes to get increased precipitation.

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Contents

This chartbook focuses on the following topics.

- United States Employment
- Colorado Employment – Large Sectors
- Colorado Employment – Small Sectors
- Colorado Summary of Employment

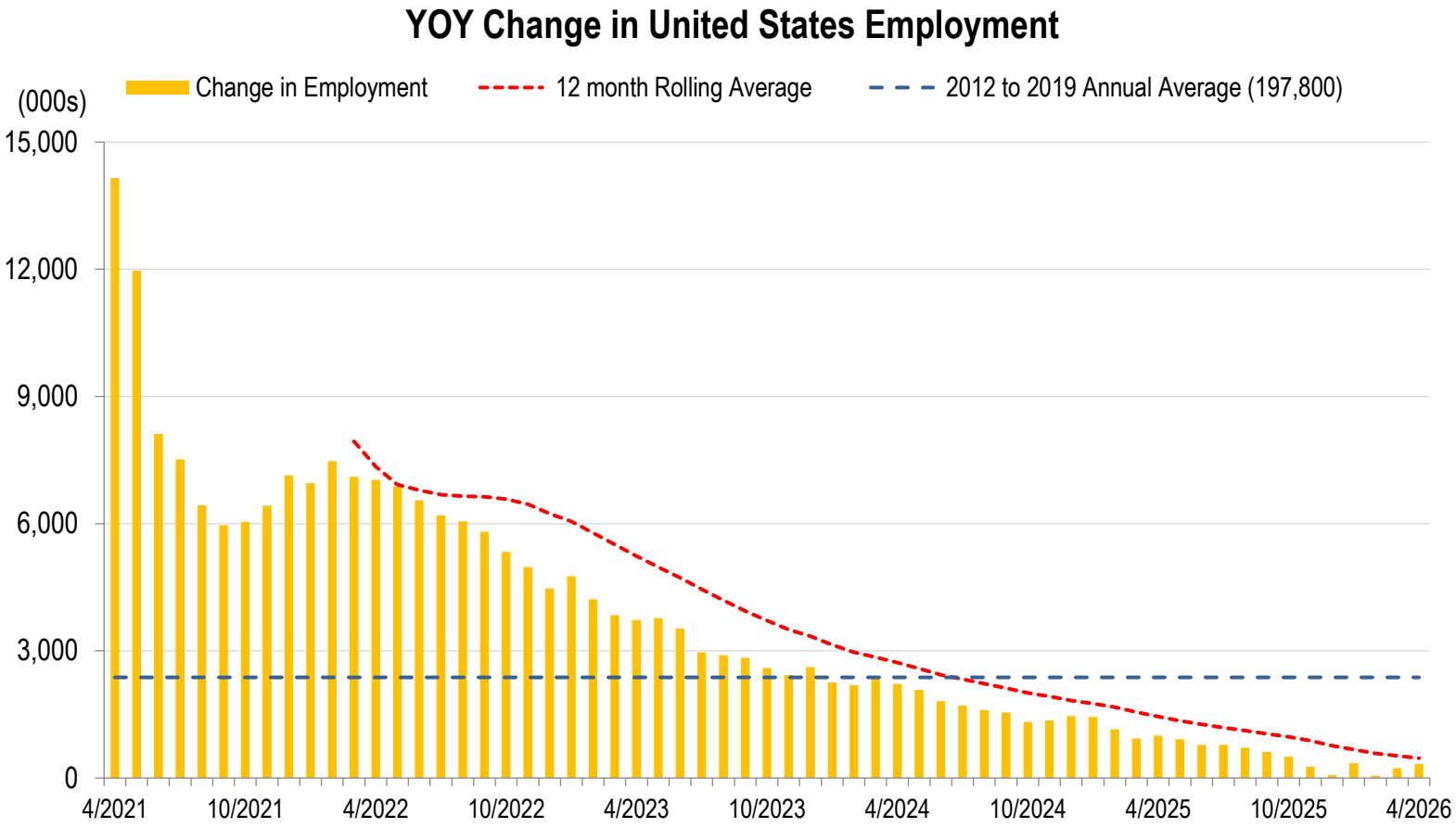
Summary of March 2026 Colorado Labor Market

- The Colorado labor market is weak. Private sector job losses are broad-based. YOY March employment shows that Colorado employment increased in three of the ten largest sectors. It increased in three of the nine smallest sectors/subsectors.
- Essential employment, such as healthcare, is the most relevant and likely to increase. Employment in sectors such as information or PBS is riskier. It is more susceptible to stagnancy or declines.
- Colorado was ranked 43rd for its YOY change in employment for March 2026. This occurred when the U.S. was not in a recession. YOY Colorado employment has decreased in 14 consecutive months.
- In 2025, Colorado's real GDP was 2.1%, the same as the U.S. Colorado was ranked 17th for real GDP growth.

U.S. and Colorado Employment

YOY Change in Employment

United States



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, NSA cber.co. Note: NSA data used in chart.

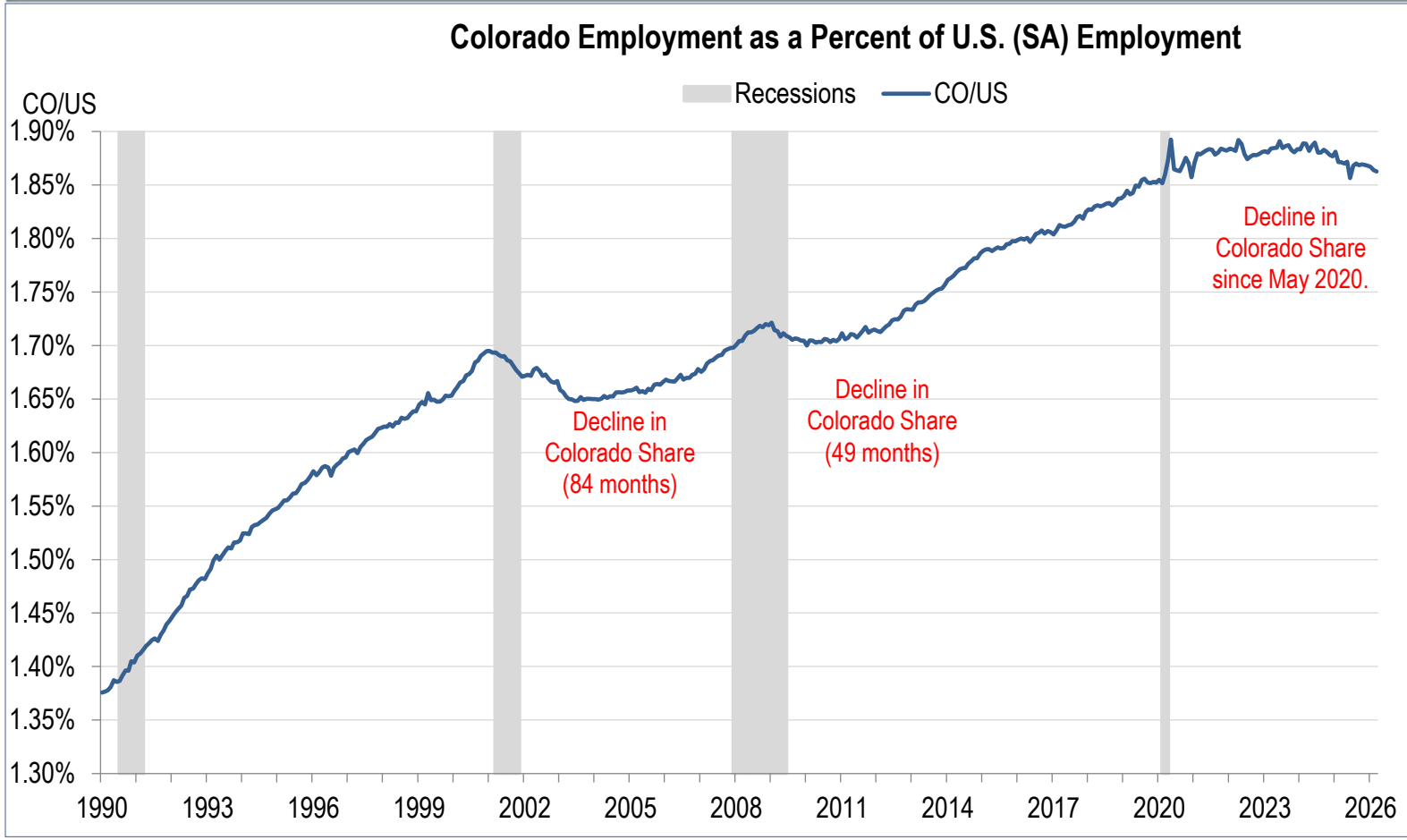
Change in U.S. Employment

From 2012 to 2019, the average annual change in employment was 2,373,900 (blue dotted line), and the average monthly change was 197,800.

April 2021 was the first month after the pandemic that the YOY change in annual employment was positive (yellow bars). It was 14.1 million. It trended downward to 327,000 in April 2026.

The 12-month rolling average (red dotted line) peaked at 7.9 million in March 2022. It has fallen to 467,000 in April 2026. Based on that value, average annual monthly employment growth has been 38,900.

Colorado Employment as a Percent of U.S. Employment



Source: BLS, S.A.cber.co.

Colorado Employment as a Percent of U.S. Employment

This chart shows Colorado employment as a share of U.S. employment. Colorado's share of U.S. employment declined during the 2001 Recession, the Great Financial Crisis, and after the COVID-19 recession.

The first trough began at 1.69%. It was at or below that value for 84 months, from September 2000 to August 2027.

The second trough began at 1.72%. It was at or below that value for 49 months, from August 2008 to August 2012.

The third trough began at 1.89% in May 2020. The Colorado share has been at or below that value since then.

In March 2026, Colorado's employment was 1.86% of U.S. employment.

Change in Colorado Annual Employment

1980 to 2025

Change in Colorado Employment – 46 Years

Between 1980 and 2025, the average annual employment was 37,900. The volatility by decade is significant. (see table to the right).

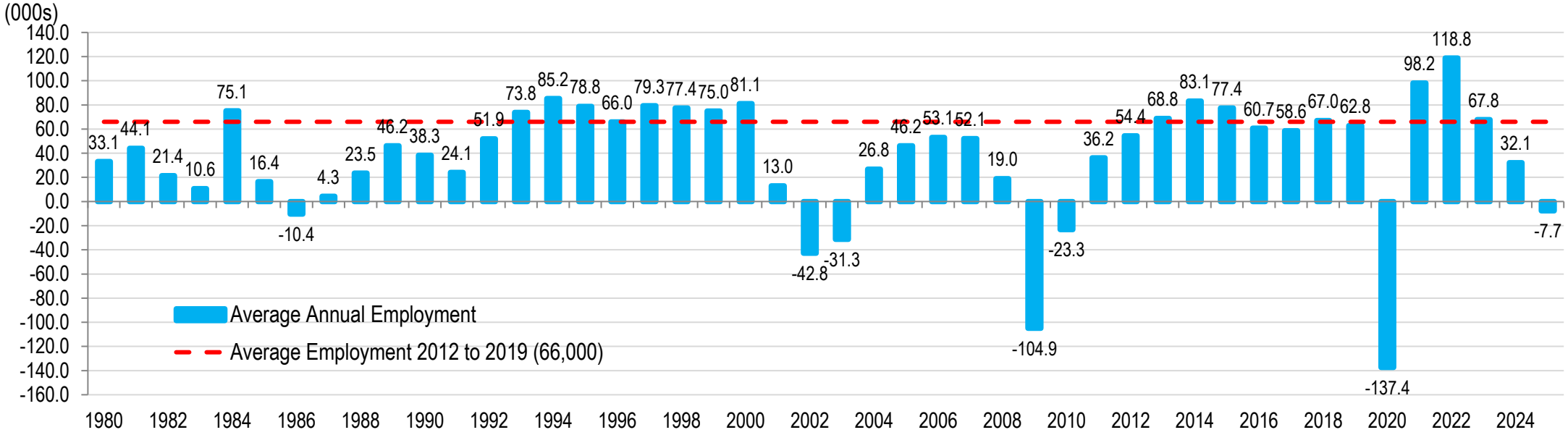
Average Annual Change by Decade (Thousands)

1980 to 1989	26.4	2010 to 2019	54.6
1990 to 1999	65.0	2020 to 2025	28.6
2000 to 2009	11.2	1980 to 2025	37.9

Change in Colorado Employment – Booms and Busts – 2020 to 2025

Colorado has a boom-and-bust economy. The change in annual employment has been negative seven times. Four of those times were between 2002 and 2010. Between 2012 and 2019, average annual employment increased by 66,600. The average annual growth from 2020 to 2025 was 28,600.

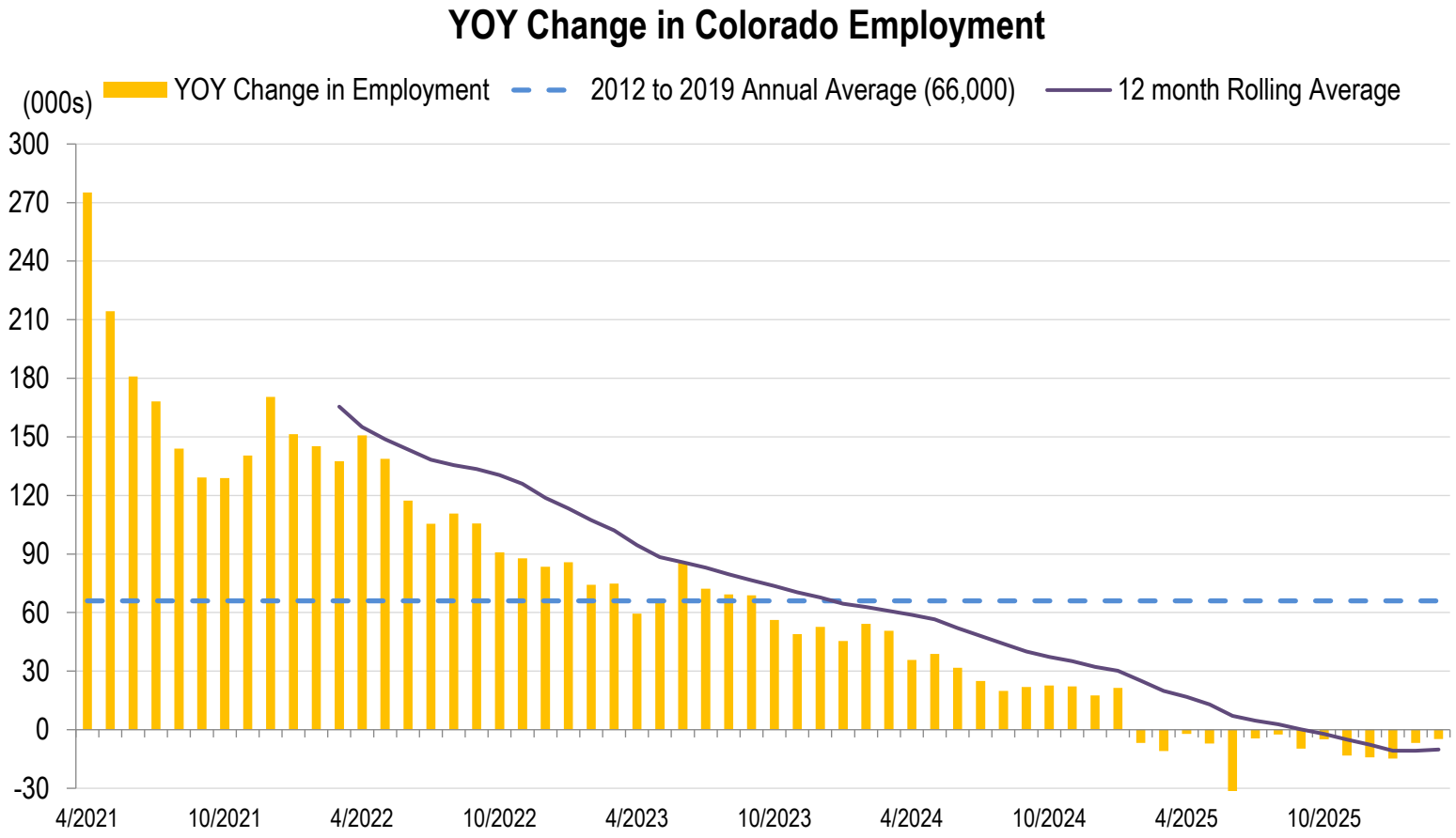
Change in Colorado Employment (Annual)



Source: BLS, NSA, cber.co.

YOY Change in Employment

Colorado



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, NSA cber.co.

Change in Employment

From 2012 to 2019, average annual employment was 66,000 (blue dotted line). The average monthly change was 5,500.

April 2021 was the first month after the pandemic when the change in YOY employment was positive (275,200 – yellow bars). Since then, the YOY monthly employment has trended downward. The YOY value has been negative for 14 consecutive months. It was -4,700 in March 2026.

In March 2022, the 12-month rolling average (purple solid line) peaked at 165,475. It has since trended downwards and was -10,200 in March 2026.

Colorado Employment – Large Sectors

Colorado Employment and Change in Employment

Sectors with more than 140,000 Employees

Colorado Employment YOY Change (000s)					
Industry Sector	Employment and Change				
Sectors with more than 140,000 employees	Dec.2019	Mar. 2025	Mar. 2026	Dec. 2019 vs. Mar. 2026	Mar. 2025 vs. Mar. 2026
Healthcare and Social Assistance (HSA)	306.3	343.8	357.7	51.4	13.9
Local Government	273.7	292.3	291.7	18.0	(0.6)
Prof., Scientific, and Tech, Services (PST)	240.3	291.8	290.2	49.9	(1.6)
Accommodation and Food (F&A)	287.7	286.6	284.6	(3.1)	(2.0)
Retail Trade	271.6	271.2	266.5	(5.1)	(4.7)
Construction	180.5	186.6	188.3	7.8	1.7
Financial Activities	175.7	180.8	176.3	0.6	(4.5)
Administrative Services	162.2	150.3	148.0	(14.2)	(2.3)
State Government	131.4	141.7	145.3	13.9	3.6
Manfacturing	151.3	147.3	143.6	(7.7)	(3.7)
Total Sectors >140,000 Employees	2,180.7	2,292.4	2,292.2	111.5	(0.2)

Highlights

Sectors with > 140,000 Employment (Sorted by Size)

About 77.6% of employees are in the ten largest sectors. In the recovery from the 2020 recession, the primary source of job creation was healthcare and PST. State and local government and construction were secondary contributors.

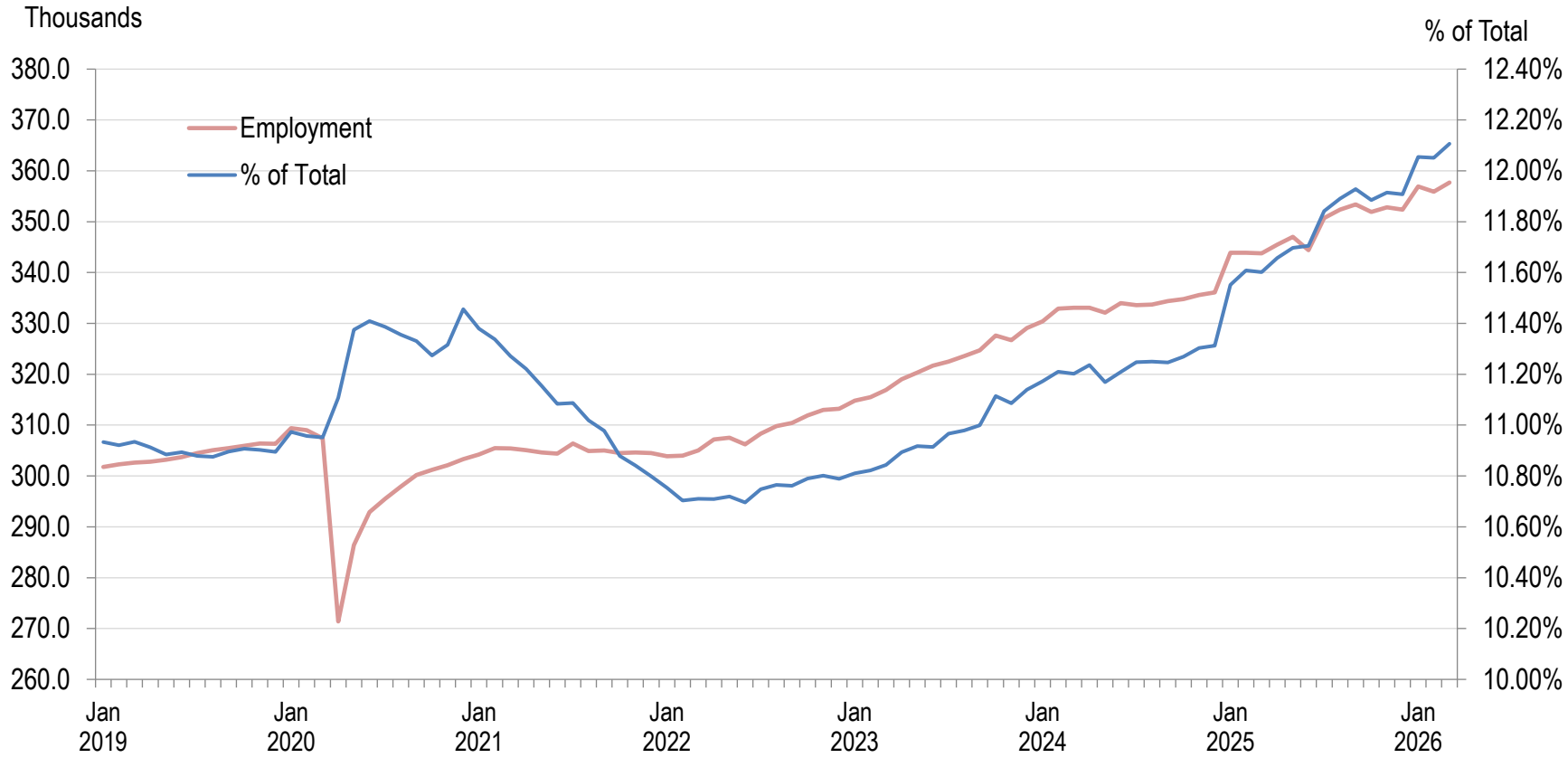
On a YOY basis, HSA created the most jobs. State government and construction were secondary contributors.

Source: BLS, SA, cber.co.

Colorado Healthcare and Social Assistance

Employment and Percent of Total Employment

HSA Employment and Percent of Total Employment



Source: BLS, monthly SA, cber.co.

HSA Employment

Employment increased from 301,800 in January 2019 to 357,700 in March 2026 (red).

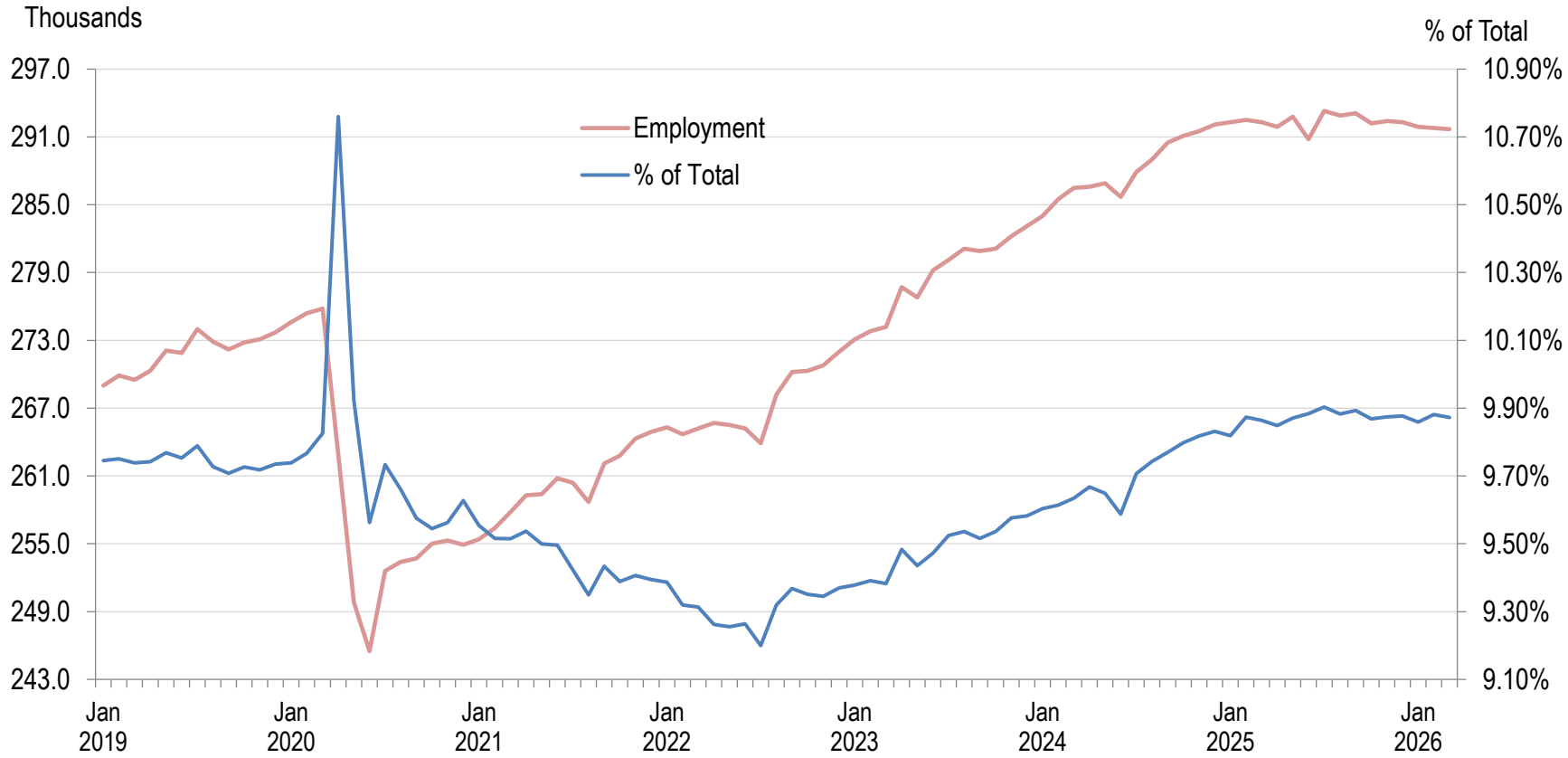
There has been a steady increase since January 2022. Aging boomers have created demand for health care.

In January 2019, sector employment was 10.9% of total employment (blue). It rose to 11.4% of total employment during the COVID-19 era. It dropped off and bottomed out at 10.7% in 2022. It has since increased to 12.1% in March 2026.

Colorado Local Government

Employment and Percent of Total Employment

Local Government and Percent of Total Employment



Source: BLS, monthly SA, cber.co.

Local Government Employment

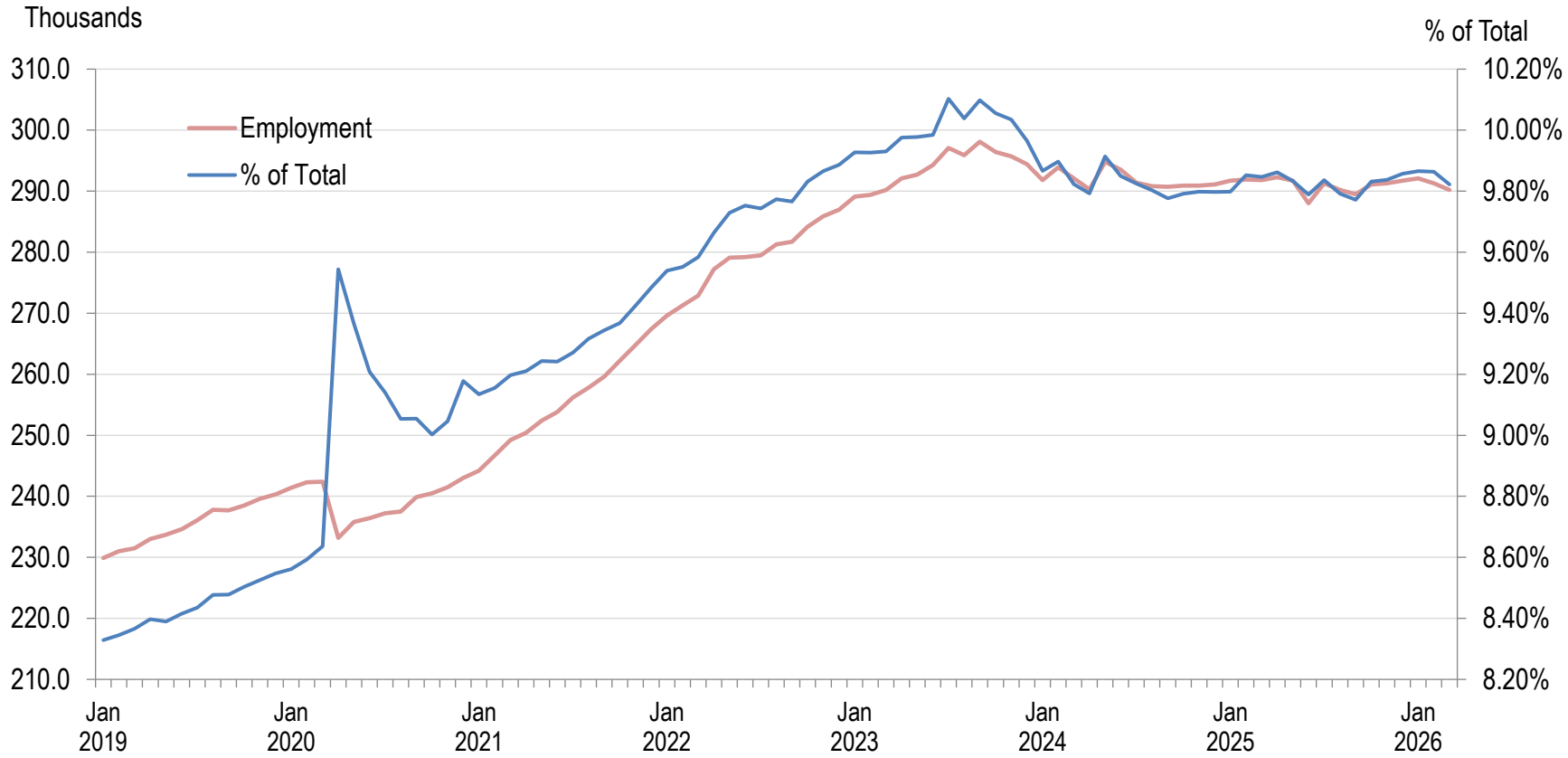
Employment increased from 269,000 in January 2019 to 291,700 in March 2026 (red). It peaked at 293,300 in July 2025. Employment has slowed with slower population growth.

In January 2019, sector employment was 9.75% of total employment (blue). It peaked at 10.76% in April 2019. It then bottomed out in July 2022 at 9.2%. It was 9.87% in March 2026.

Colorado Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services

Employment and Percent of Total Employment

PST Employment and Percent of Total Employment



Source: BLS, monthly SA, cber.co.

PST Employment

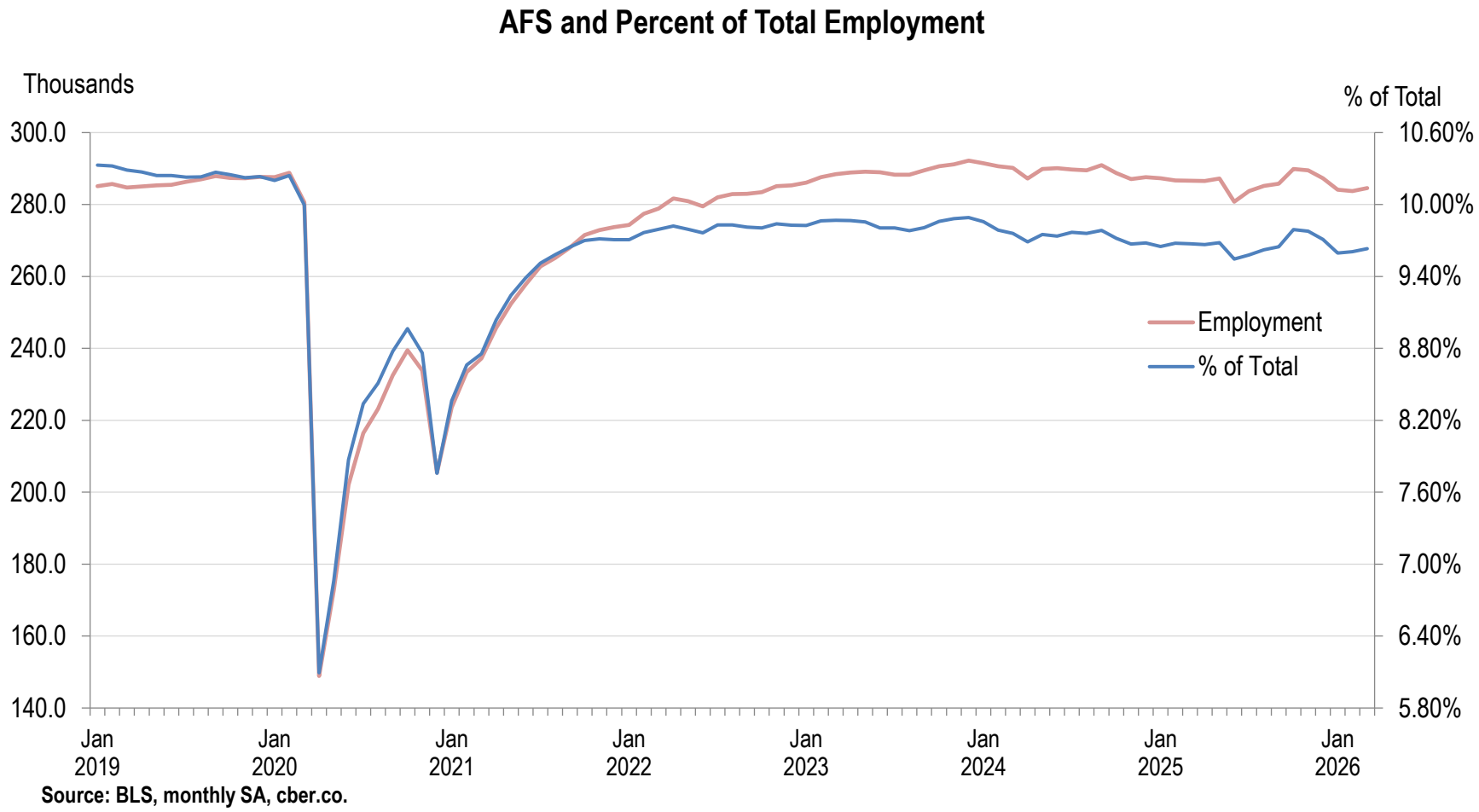
Employment increased from 229,900 in January 2019 to 290,200 in March 2026 (red). It peaked in September 2023 at 298,100. It tapered off and has been flat since Q1 2024.

Some companies in the PST sector are part of the Colorado high-tech clusters.

In January 2019, sector employment was 8.3% of total employment (blue). It rose to 10.1% of total employment during the COVID-19 era. It was 9.8% in March 2026.

Colorado Accommodation and Food Service

Employment and Percent of Total Employment



AFS Employment

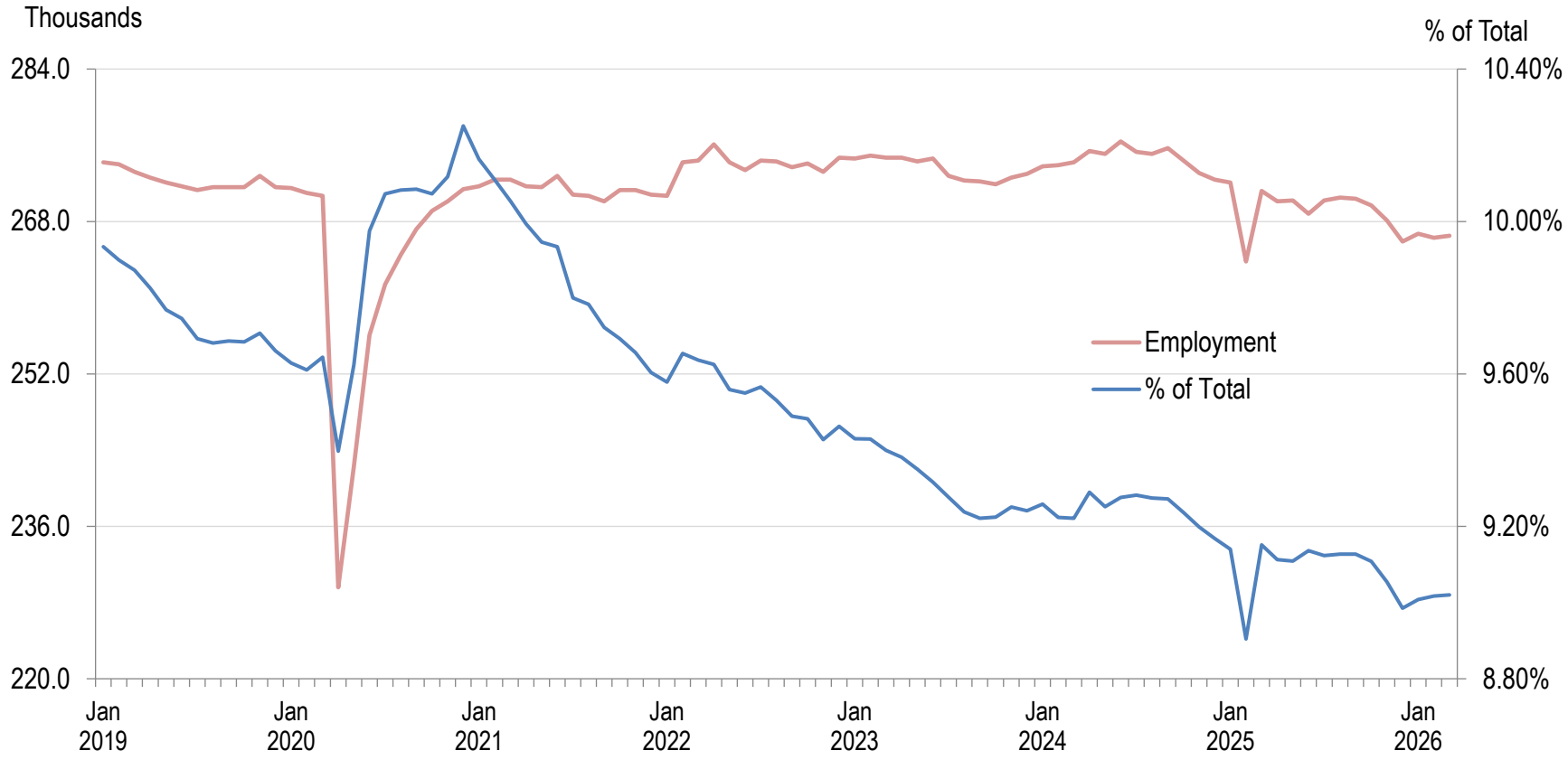
Employment decreased from 285,100 in January 2019 to 284,600 in March 2026 (red). The sector peaked at 289,900 in December 2025 and has since declined.

In January 2019, sector employment was 10.3% of total employment (blue). It declined during the COVID-19 recession and did not return to pre-COVID levels. It was 9.6% in March 2026.

Colorado Retail Trade

Employment and Percent of Total Employment

Retail Trade and Percent of Total Employment



Source: BLS, monthly SA, cber.co.

Retail Employment

Employment decreased from 274,200 in January 2019 to 266,500 in March 2026 (red). The sector peaked at 276,400 in June 2024. It has declined since then.

In January 2019, sector employment was 9.9% of total employment (blue). It was 9.0% in March 2026.

Colorado Construction

Employment and Percent of Total Employment

Construction Trade and Percent of Total Employment

Source: BLS, monthly SA, cber.co.

Construction Employment

Employment increased from 176,800 in January 2019 to 188,300 in March 2026 (red). This value was slightly below the February 2006 peak of 189,000.

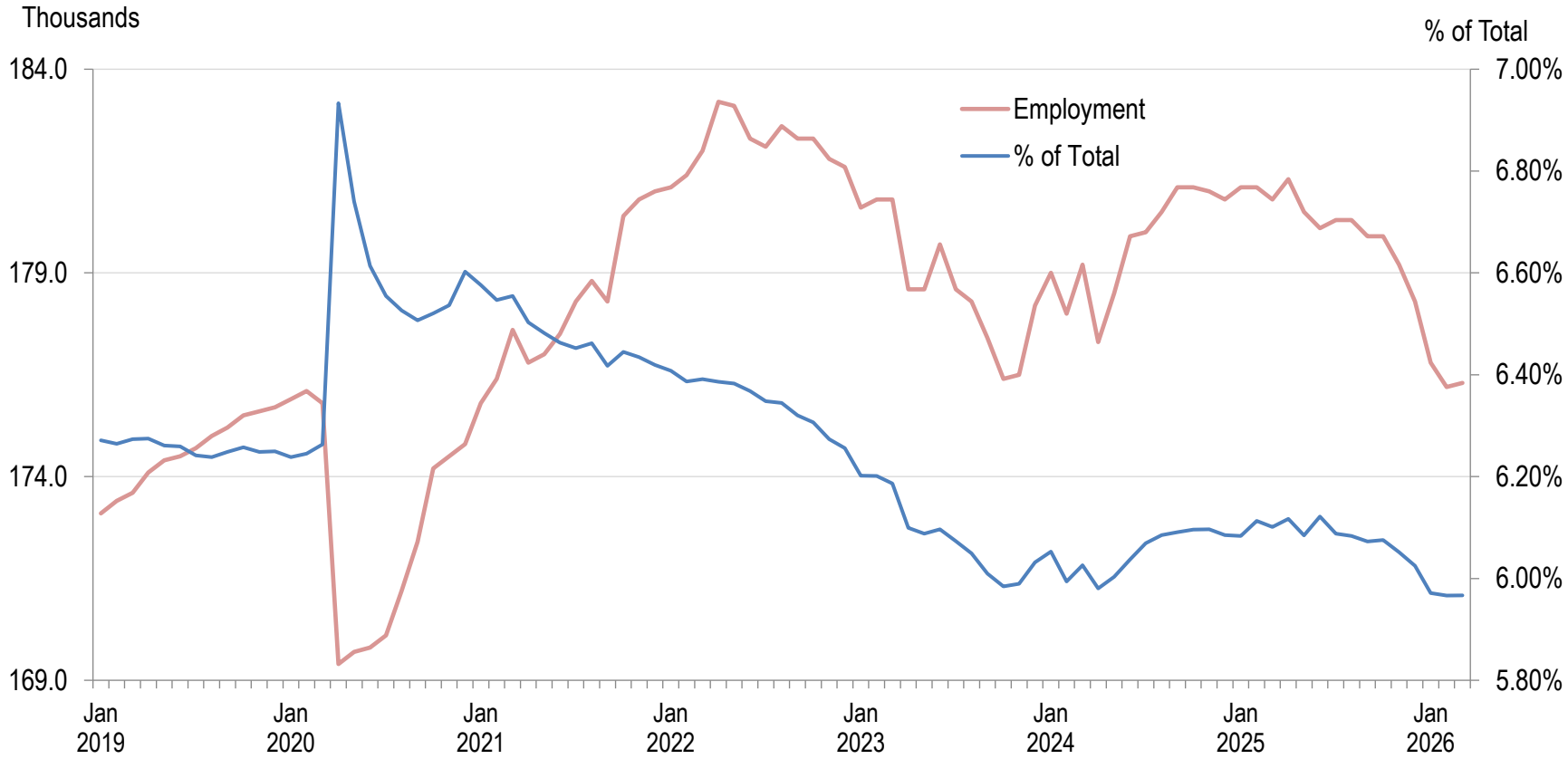
Despite the increase in construction employment, Colorado continues to have a housing shortage.

In January 2019, sector employment was 6.4% of total employment (blue). It rose to 6.9% in April 2020. It was 6.4% in March 2026.

Colorado Financial Activities

Employment and Percent of Total Employment

Financial Activities and Percent of Total Employment



Source: BLS, monthly SA, cber.co.

Financial Activities Employment

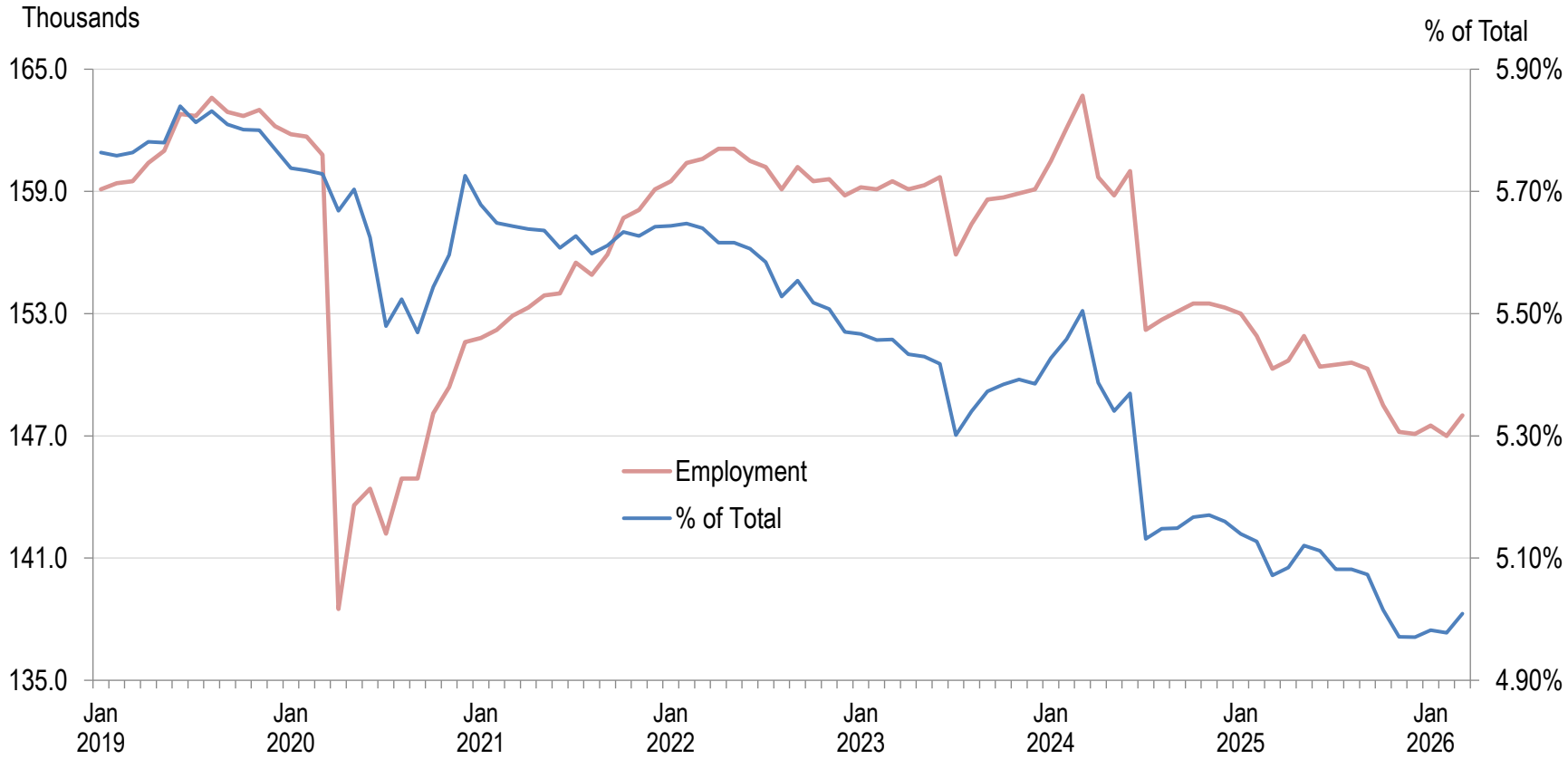
Employment increased from 173,100 in January 2019 to 176,300 in March 2026 (red). This value was slightly below the February 2006 peak of 189,000.

In January 2019, sector employment was 6.27% of total employment (blue). It rose to 6.90% in April 2020. It was 5.97% in March 2026.

Colorado Administrative Services

Employment and Percent of Total Employment

Administrative Services and Percent of Total Employment



Source: BLS, monthly SA, cber.co.

Administrative Services Employment

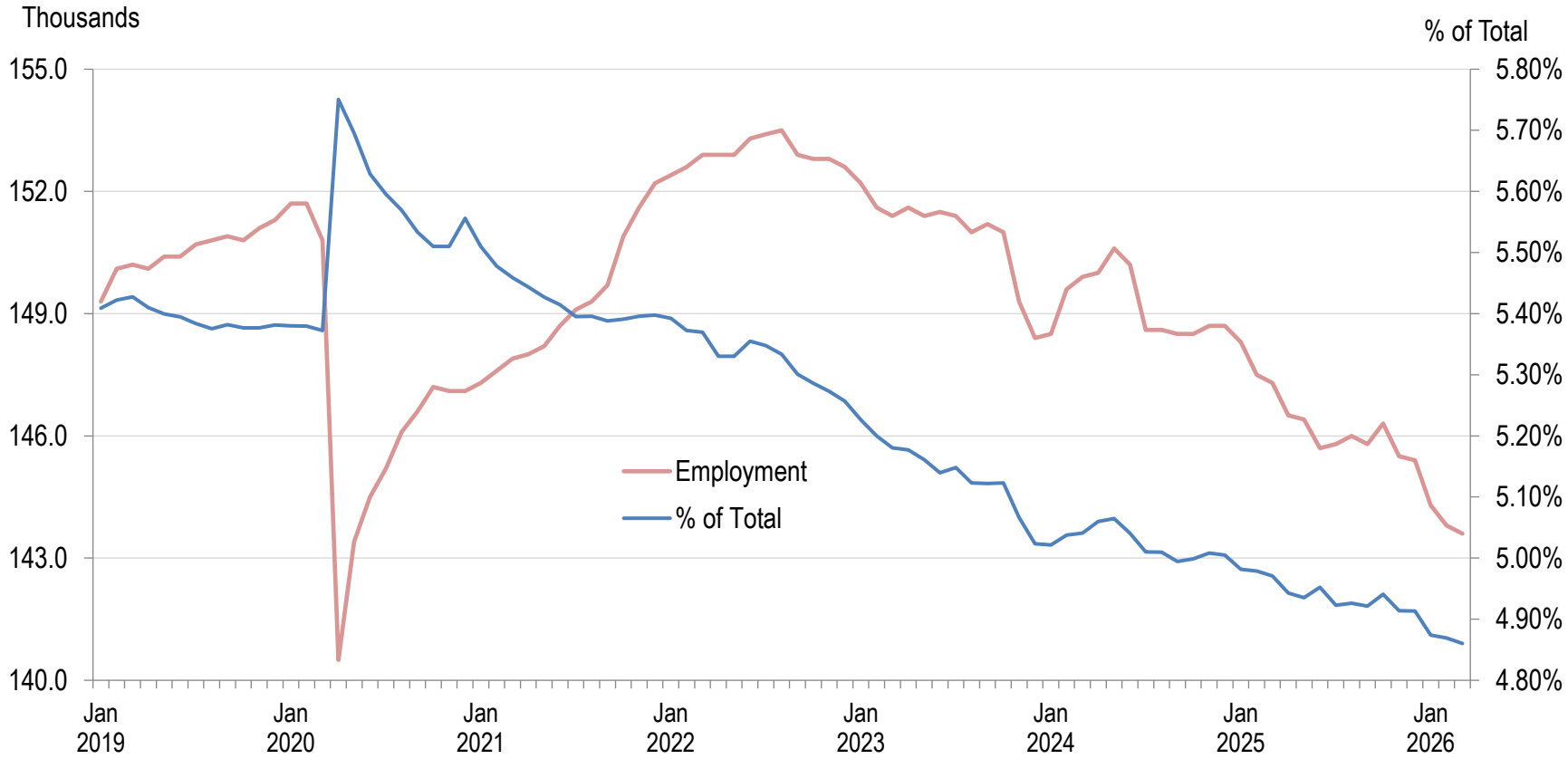
Employment decreased from 159,100 in January 2019 to 148,000 in March 2026 (red). It peaked at 163,700 in March 2024.

In January 2019, sector employment was 5.76% of total employment (blue). It peaked at 5.84% in June 2019. It was 5.01% in March 2026.

Colorado Manufacturing

Employment and Percent of Total Employment

Manufacturing and Percent of Total Employment



Source: BLS, monthly SA, cber.co.

Manufacturing Employment

Employment decreased from 149,300 in January 2019 to 143,600 in March 2026 (red). It peaked at 153,500 in August 2022.

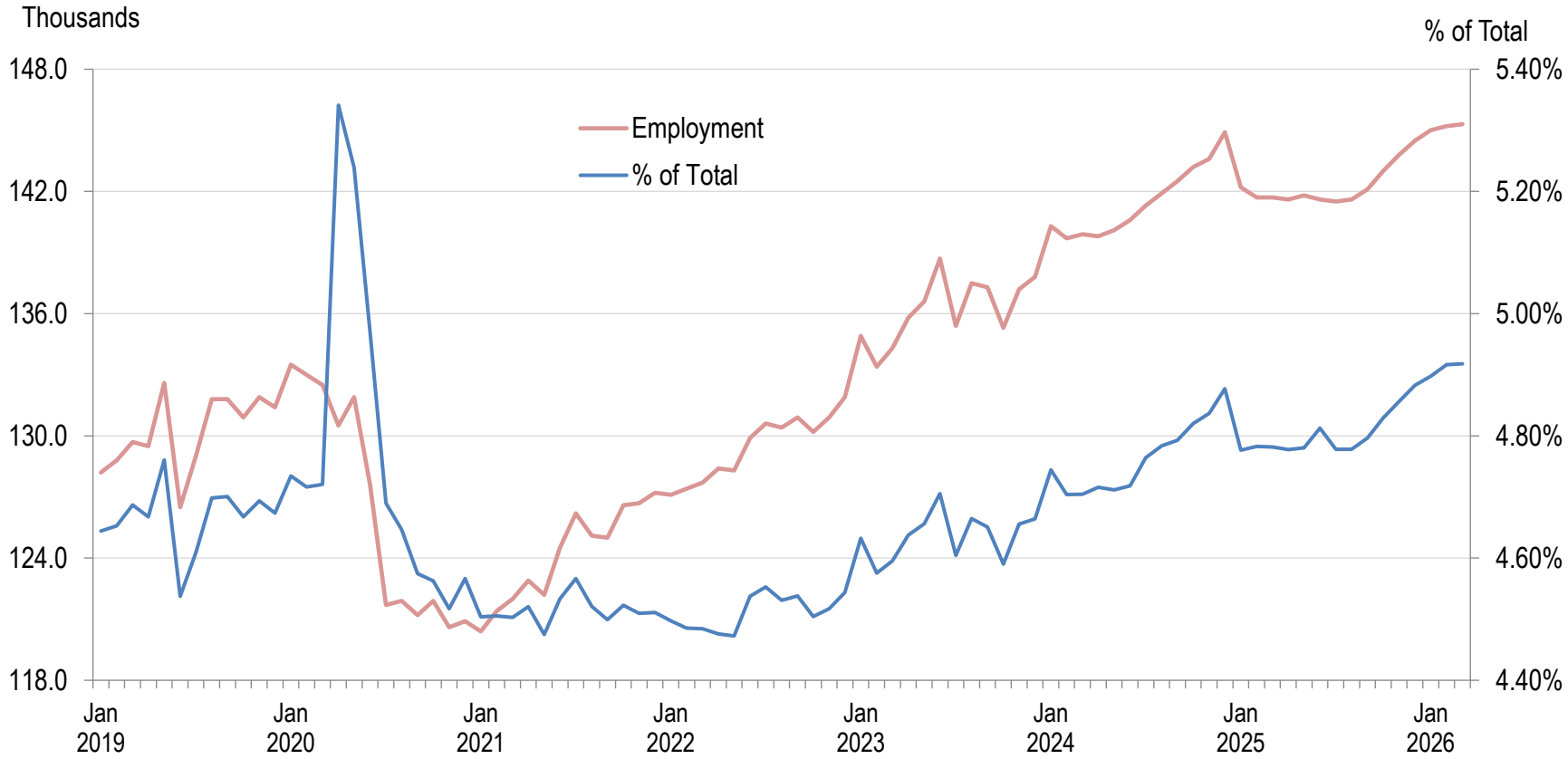
Some manufacturing companies are members of Colorado's high-tech clusters.

In January 2019, sector employment was 5.41% of total employment (blue). It peaked at 5.75% in April 2019. It was 4.86% in March 2026.

Colorado State Government

Employment and Percent of Total Employment

State Government and Percent of Total Employment



Source: BLS, monthly SA, cber.co.

State Government Employment

Employment increased from 128,200 in January 2019 to 145,300 in March 2026 (red).

In January 2019, sector employment was 4.64% of total employment (blue). It peaked at 5.34% in April 2019. It was 4.92% in March 2026.

Colorado Employment – Small Sectors

Colorado Employment and Change in Employment

Sectors with less than 140,000 Employees

Colorado Employment YOY Change (000s)					
Industry Sector	Employment and Change				
Sectors with more than 140,000 employees	Dec.2019	Mar. 2025	Mar. 2026	Dec. 2019 vs. Mar. 2026	Mar. 2025 vs. Mar. 2026
Other Services (Personal)	115.8	130.0	128.5	12.7	(1.5)
Transportation, Warehousing, and Utilities (TWU)	98.3	118.0	120.1	21.8	2.1
Wholesale Trade	111.6	115.4	113.7	2.1	(1.7)
Information	78.2	70.8	66.9	(11.3)	(3.9)
Arts, Entertainment, Recreation (AER)	59.7	64.1	65.5	5.8	1.4
Federal Government	53.1	56.6	50.5	(2.6)	(6.1)
Education (Private)	44.5	48.1	50.2	5.7	2.1
Management of Corporations and Enterprises	43.0	46.5	46.5	3.5	0.0
Extractive Industries	26.6	21.5	20.5	(6.1)	(1.0)
Total Sectors <140,000 Employees	630.8	671.0	662.4	31.6	(8.6)

Highlights

Sectors with < 140,000 Employment (Sorted by Size)

Since 2019, the primary small-sector contributors were TWU and other services. Secondary contributions were made by AER and private education. AER is part of the leisure and hospitality supersector.

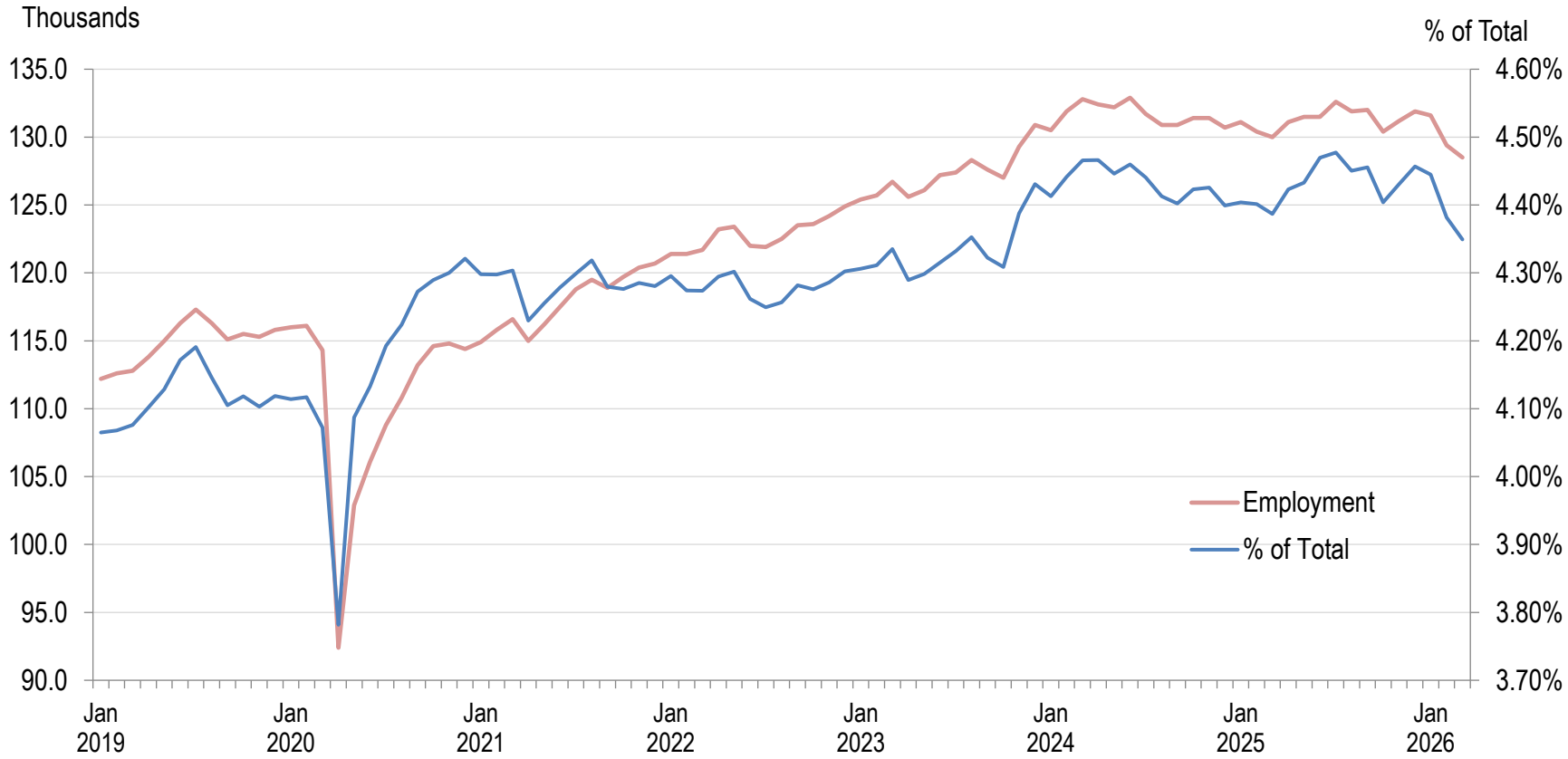
On a March YOY basis, TWU and private education were primary contributors to job growth.

Source: BLS, SA, cber.co.

Colorado Other Services

Employment and Percent of Total Employment

Other Services and Percent of Total Employment



Source: BLS, monthly SA, cber.co.

Other Services Employment

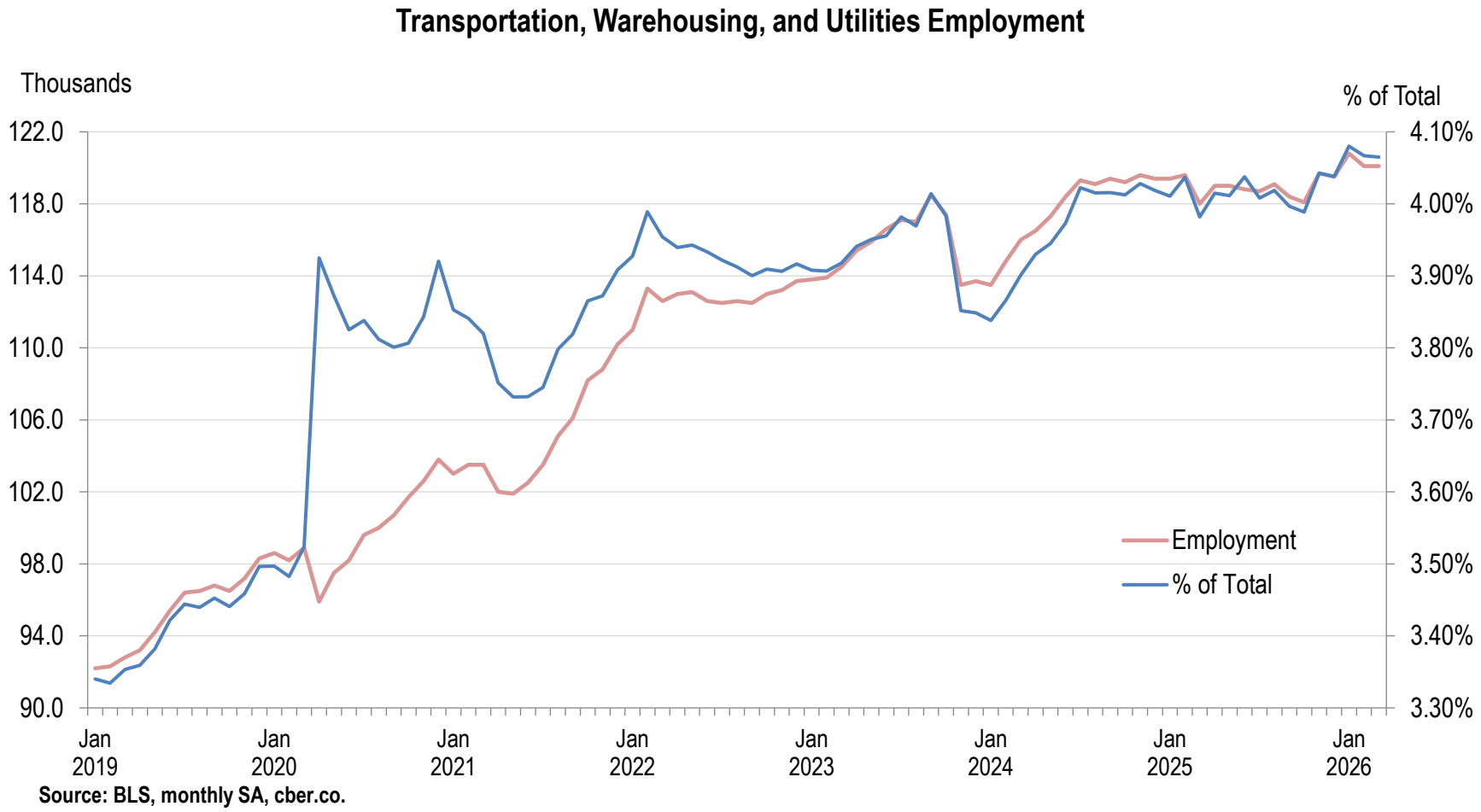
Employment increased from 112,200 in January 2019 to 128,500 in March 2026 (red). It peaked at 132,900 in June 2024.

Demand for other (personal) services has increased with as the population has grown.

In January 2019, sector employment was 4.06% of total employment (blue). It peaked at 4.48% in July 2025. and was 4.35% in March 2026.

Colorado Transportation, Warehousing, and Utilities

Employment and Percent of Total Employment



TWU Employment

Employment increased from 92,200 in January 2019 to 120,100 in March 2026 (red). It peaked at 120,800 in January 2026.

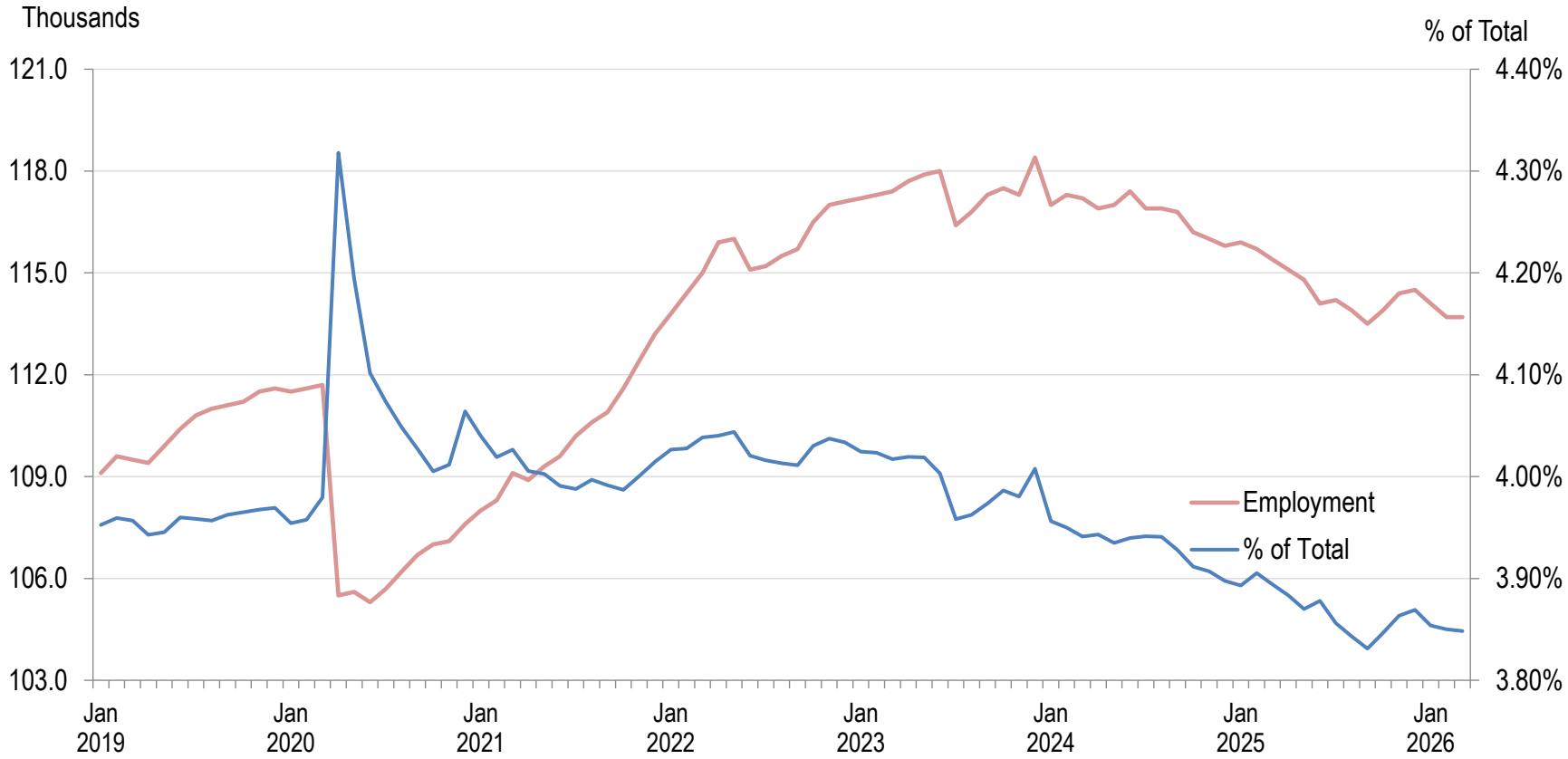
Employment has increased as Denver has become more of a transportation hub.

In January 2019, sector employment was 3.34% of total employment (blue). It was 4.06% in March 2026.

Colorado Wholesale Trade

Employment and Percent of Total Employment

Wholesale Trade Employment and Percent of Total Employment



Source: BLS, monthly SA, cber.co.

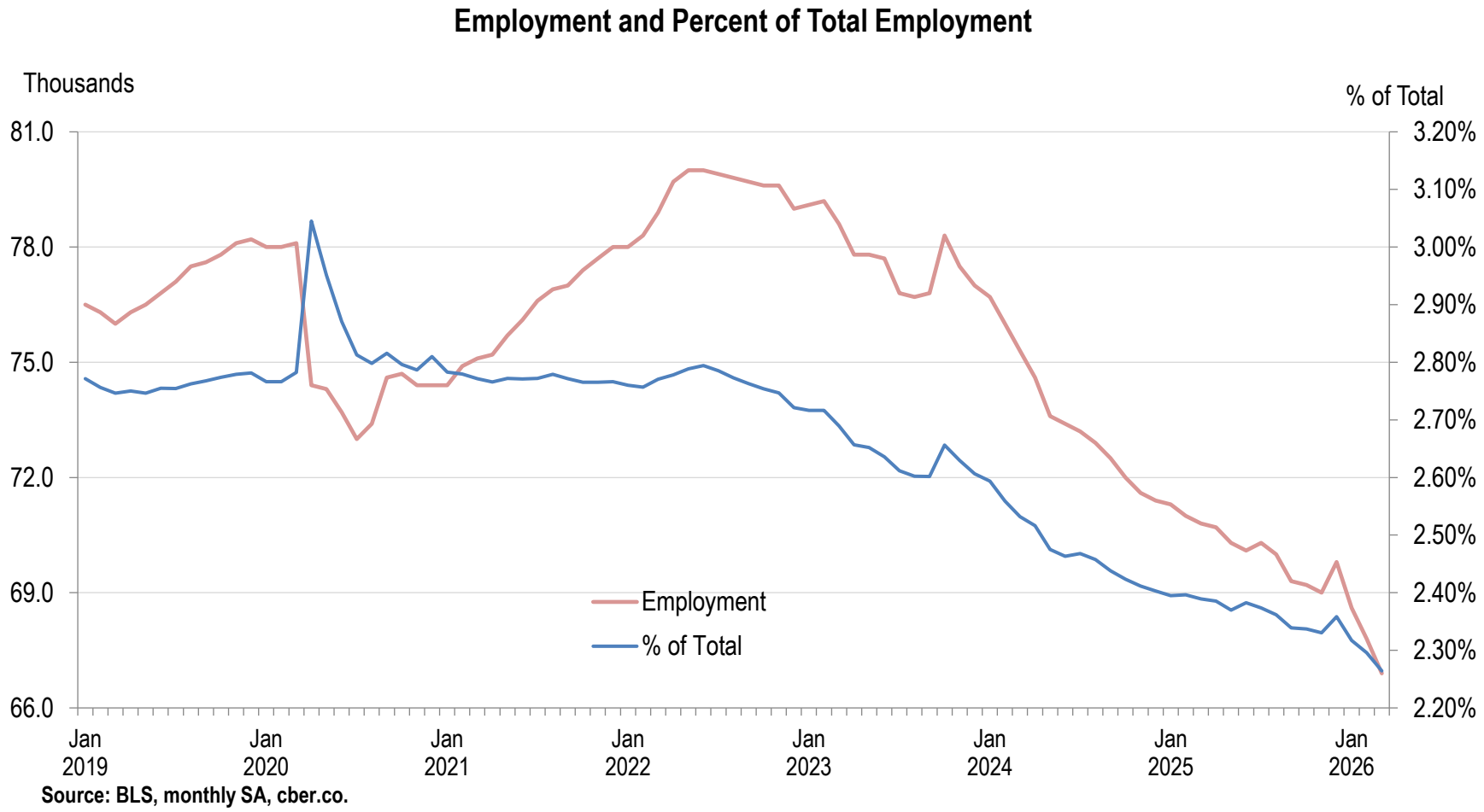
Wholesale Trade Employment

Employment increased from 106,100 in January 2019 to 113,700 in March 2026 (red). It peaked at 118,400 in December 2025.

In January 2019, sector employment was 3.95% of total employment (blue). It peaked at 4.32% in April 2020 and was 3.85% in March 2026.

Colorado Information

Employment and Percent of Total Employment



Information Employment

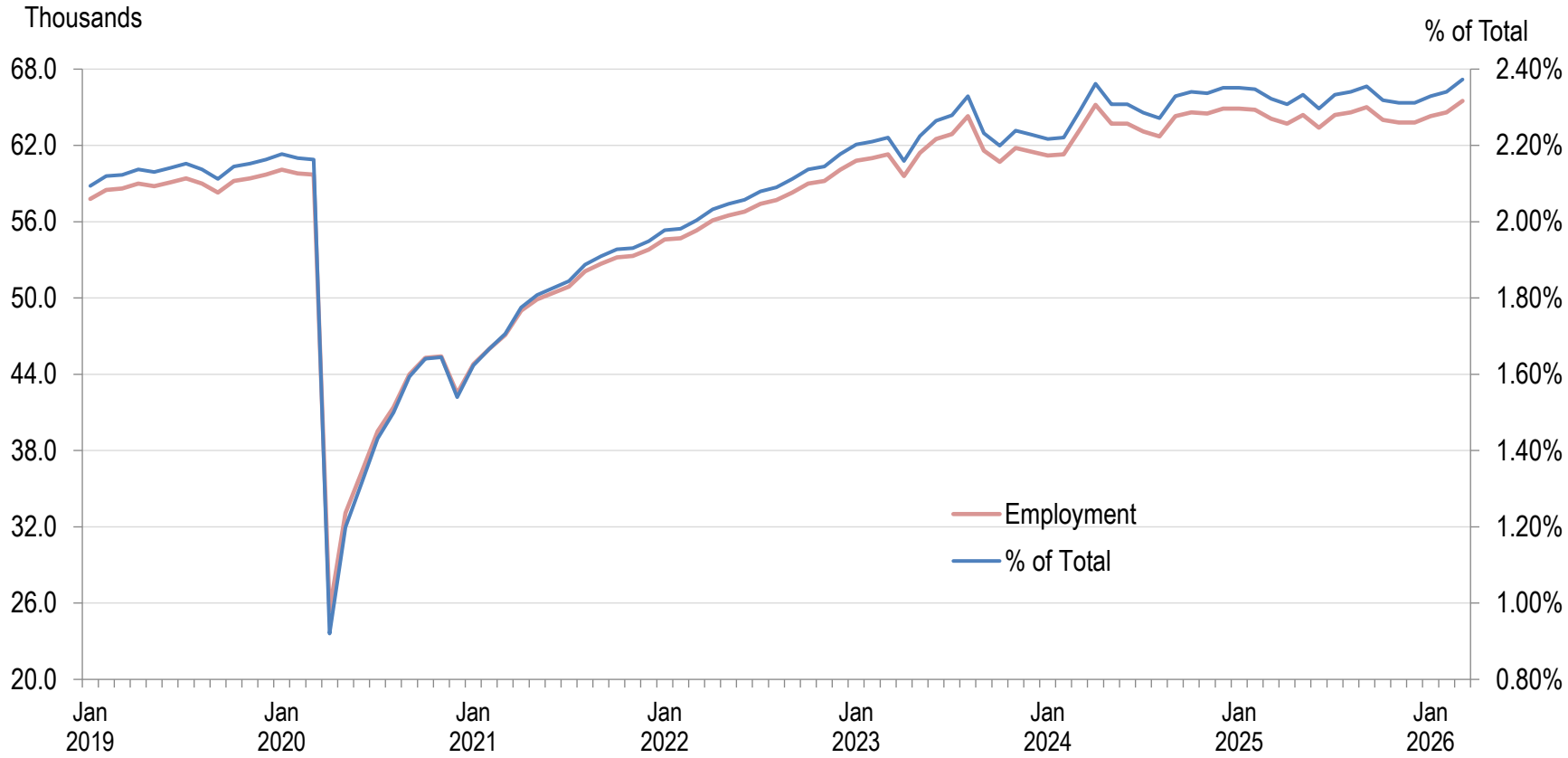
Employment decreased from 76,500 in January 2019 to 66,900 in March 2026 (red). It peaked at 80,000 in June 2022.

In January 2019, sector employment was 3.95% of total employment (blue). It peaked at 4.32% in April 2020. It was 2.26% in March 2026.

Colorado Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation

Employment and Percent of Total Employment

AER Employment and Percent of Total Employment



Source: BLS, monthly SA, cber.co.

AER Employment

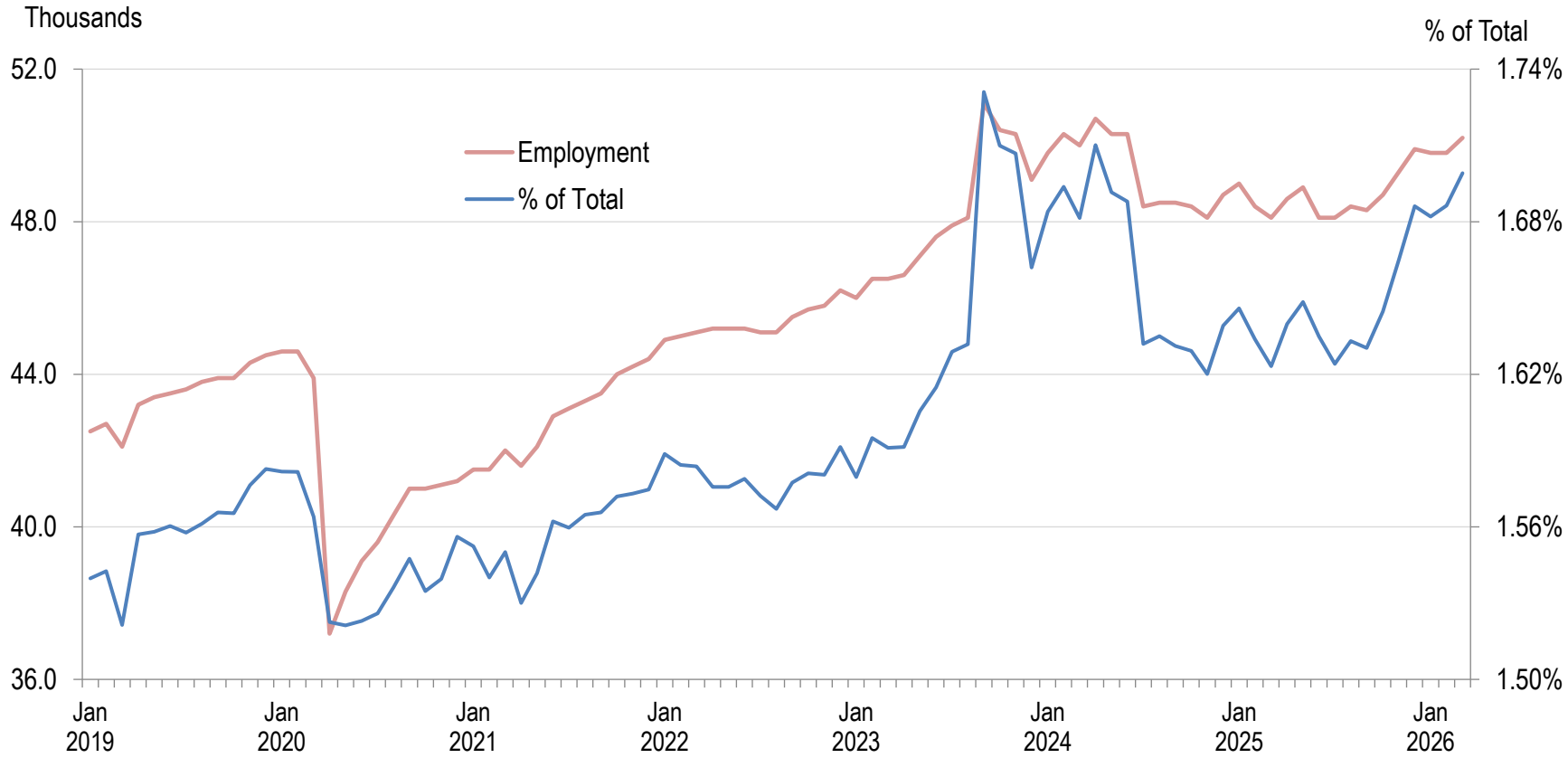
Employment increased from 57,800 in January 2019 to 65,500 in March 2026 (red).

In January 2019, sector employment was 2.09% of total employment (blue). It was 2.37% in March 2026.

Colorado Private Education

Employment and Percent of Total Employment

Private Education Employment and Percent of Total Employment



Source: BLS, monthly SA, cber.co.

Private Education Employment

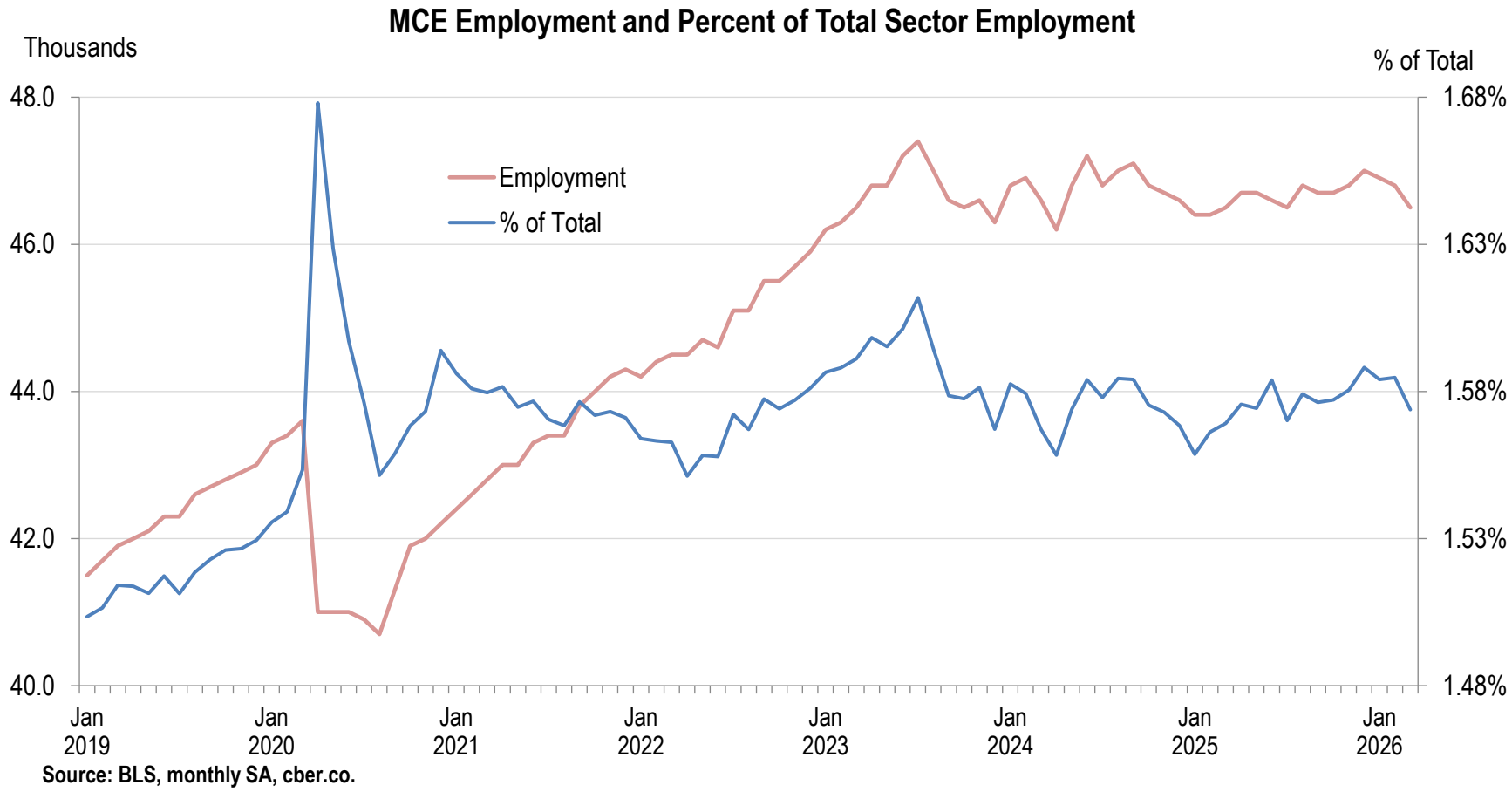
Employment increased from 42,500 in January 2019 to 60,200 in March 2026 (red). Employment peaked in September 2023 at 51,400.

Employment in the sector has increased as the population has grown.

In January 2019, sector employment was 1.54% of total employment (blue). It was 1.70% in March 2026.

Colorado Management of Companies and Enterprises

Employment and Percent of Total Employment



MCE Employment

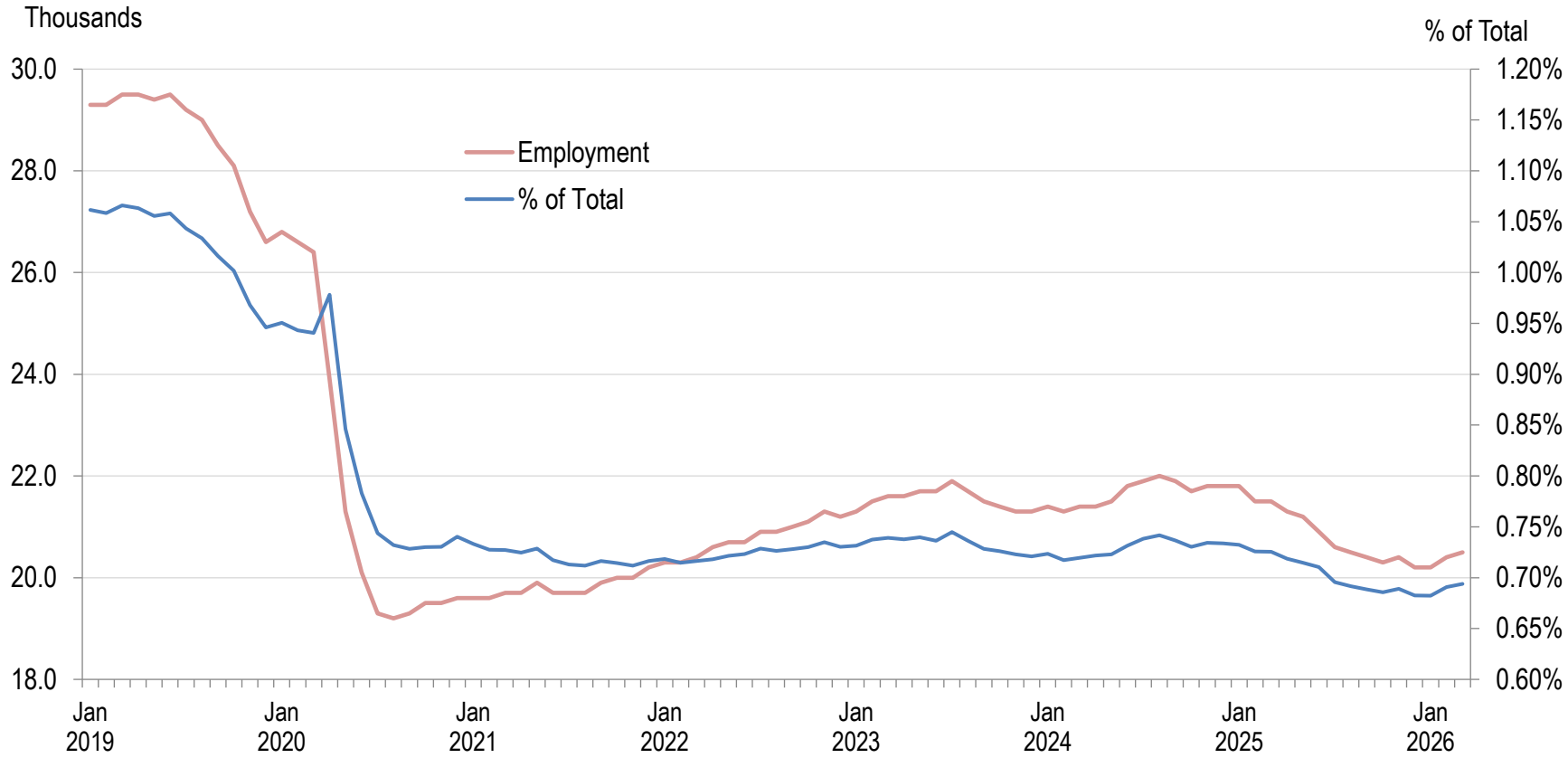
Employment increased from 41,500 in January 2019 to 46,500 in March 2026 (red). Employment peaked in July 2023 at 47,400.

In January 2019, sector employment was 1.50% of total employment (blue). It was 1.57% in March 2026. It peaked at 1.68% in April 2020.

Colorado Extractive Industries

Employment and Percent of Total Employment

Extractive Industries and Percent of Total Sector Employment



Source: BLS, monthly SA, cber.co.

Extractive Employment

Employment decreased from 29,300 in January 2019 to 20,500 in March 2026 (red).

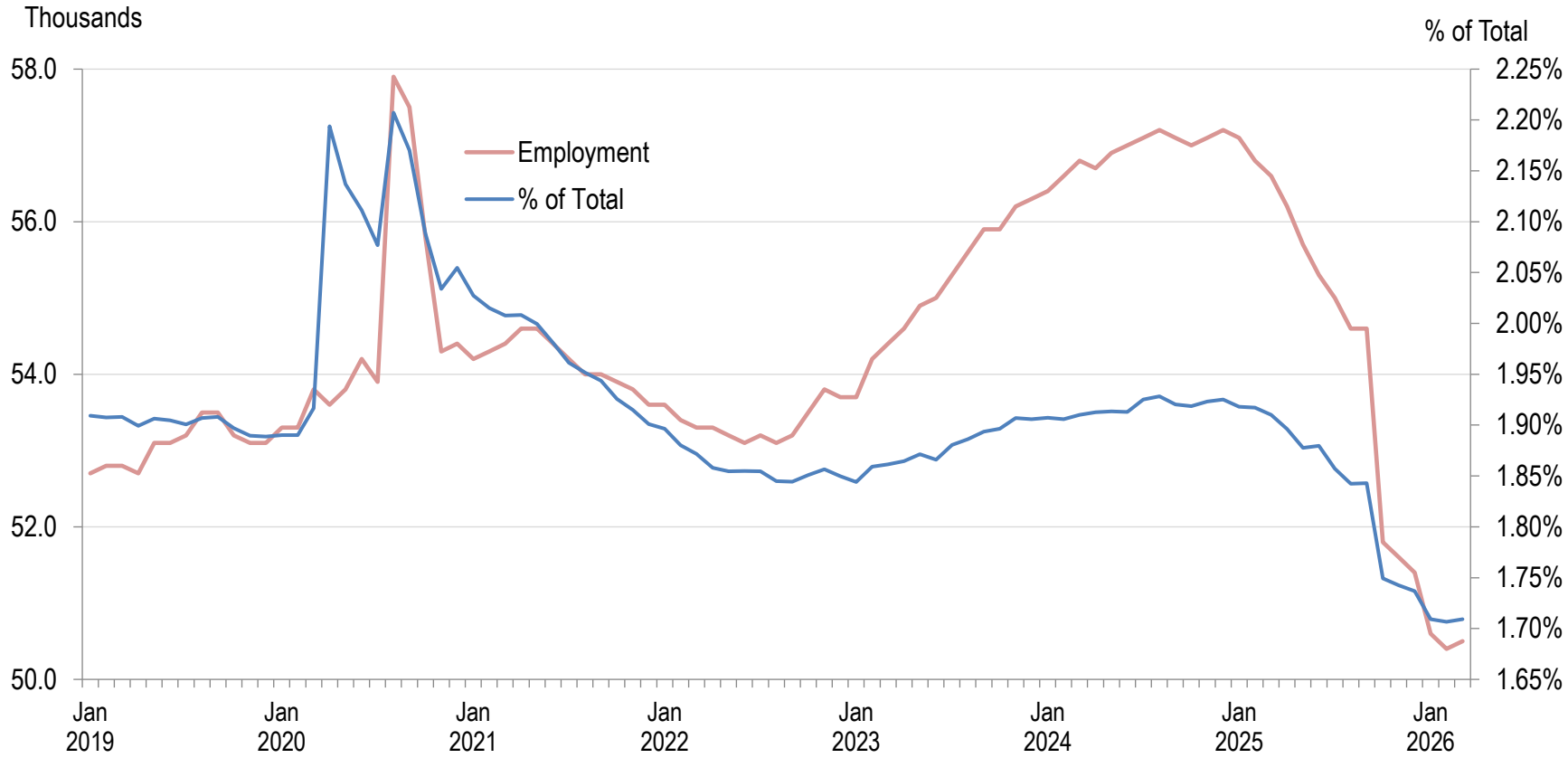
The decline in employment is a function of state regulations and policies and reduced demand during the COVID-era..

In January 2019, sector employment was 1.06% of total employment (blue). It was 0.69% in March 2026.

Colorado Federal Government

Employment and Percent of Total Employment

Federal Government and Percent of Total Sector Employment



Source: BLS, monthly SA, cber.co.

Federal Government Employment

Employment decreased from 52,700 in January 2019 to 50,500 in March 2026 (red). It peaked at 57,900 in August 2020.

Historically, employment in the sector is volatile. Recent declines are a function of reduced federal funding.

In January 2019, sector employment was 1.91% of total employment (blue). It was 1.71% in March 2026. It peaked at 2.21% in August 2020.

Colorado Economic Forecast Summary

Year-Over-Year Employment by States

March 2026 vs. March 2025

Rank	State	YOY Change Mar. 2026 v Mar. 2025	Pct. Change
1	California	144.7	0.8%
2	Texas	117.2	0.8%
3	North Carolina	44.5	0.9%
4	Nevada	28.7	1.8%
5	Pennsylvania	23.4	0.4%
6	Ohio	18.2	0.3%
7	South Carolina	12.1	0.5%
8	Utah	10.9	0.6%
9	Alabama	9.9	0.5%
10	Louisiana	9.6	0.5%
11	Tennessee	9.2	0.3%
12	Washington	9.1	0.3%
13	Arkansas	6.9	0.5%
14	Minnesota	5.1	0.2%
15	Idaho	4.9	0.6%
16	New Jersey	4.0	0.1%
17	Georgia	2.5	0.1%
18	North Dakota	2.1	0.5%
19	South Dakota	1.1	0.2%
20	Mississippi	0.9	0.1%
21	Delaware	0.7	0.1%
22	Wyoming	0.1	0.0%
23	Maine	0.0	0.0%
24	Connecticut	-0.3	0.0%
25	Montana	-0.4	-0.1%
26	Vermont	-0.9	-0.3%
27	Alaska	-1.2	-0.4%
28	Rhode Island	-1.3	-0.3%
29	New Mexico	-1.5	-0.2%
30	Hawaii	-1.7	-0.3%
31	Kentucky	-2.0	-0.1%
32	West Virginia	-2.3	-0.3%
33	Nebraska	-2.7	-0.3%
34	Kansas	-4.1	-0.3%
35	Illinois	-4.3	-0.1%
36	Oklahoma	-4.7	-0.3%
37	New Hampshire	-5.8	-0.8%
38	Massachusetts	-7.5	-0.2%
39	New York	-8.4	-0.1%
40	Missouri	-8.4	-0.3%
41	Arizona	-8.6	-0.3%
42	Michigan	-8.8	-0.2%
43	Colorado ★	-8.8	-0.3%
44	Indiana	-10.4	-0.3%
45	Wisconsin	-17.2	-0.6%
46	Iowa	-20.7	-1.3%
47	Oregon	-21.9	-1.1%
48	Florida	-22.4	-0.2%
49	Virginia	-33.4	-0.8%
50	Dist. of Columbia	-40.3	-5.3%
51	Maryland	-49.9	-1.8%

California and Texas had the largest absolute growth. The Rocky Mountain States of Utah and Idaho were ranked in the top 15.

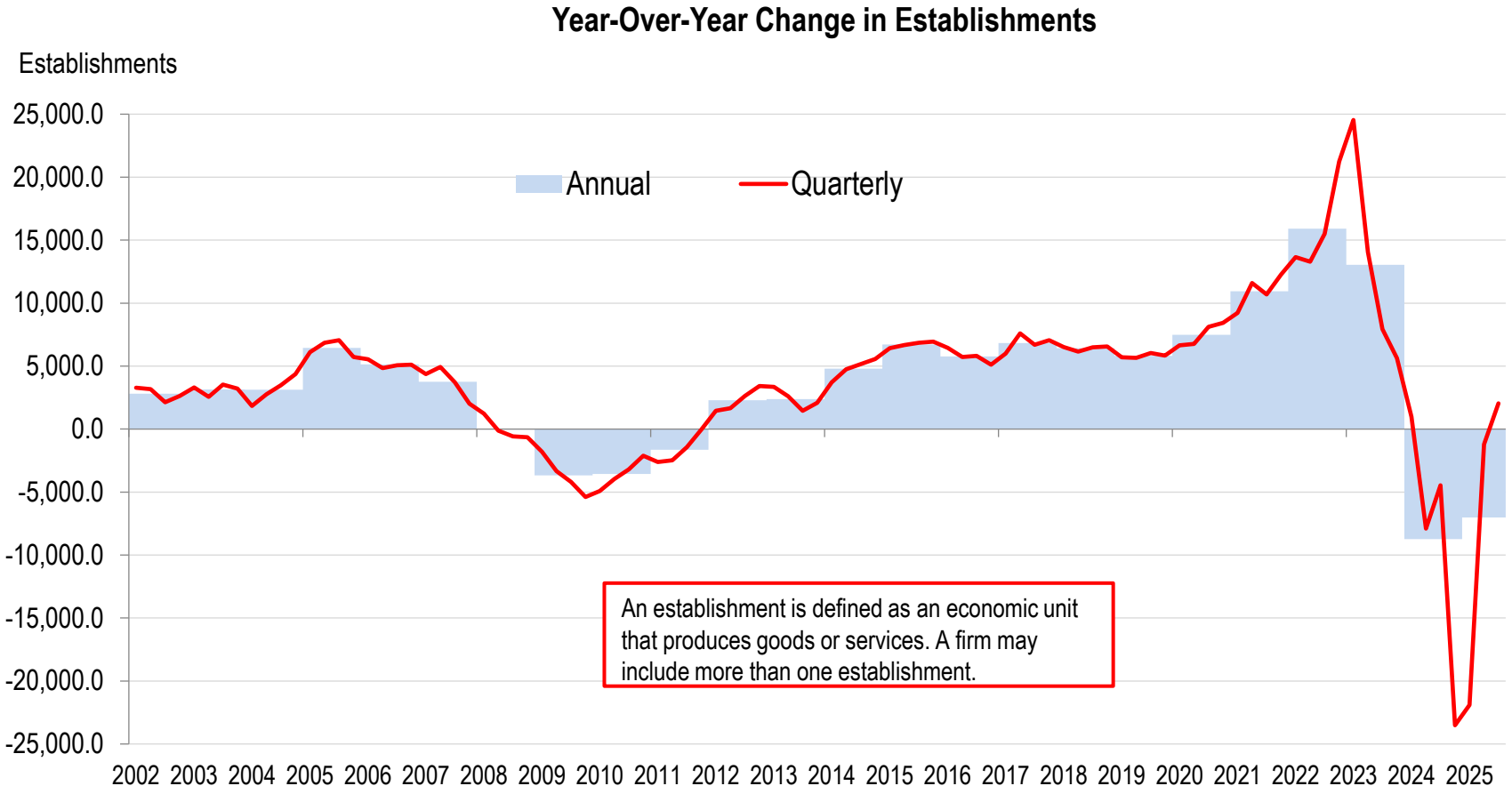
Twenty-two states added jobs, and 29 states, including the District of Columbia, posted declines.

Colorado was ranked 43rd for job creation. The range of jobs added was -49,900 to 144,700. Nevada was the only state with a growth rate more than 1.0%.

Source: BLS, SA, cber.co.

YOY Change in Establishments

2002 to Current



Source: QCEW, BLS, cber.co.

Change in Establishments

The QCEW data series is the basis for the nonfarm Payroll data. In addition to tracking employment, it also tracks the number of business establishments.

Between 2002 and 2025, there were 20 quarters and 6 years when the YOY change in the number of establishments was negative. (Q4 2025 was estimated).

The first four years with negative growth were associated with the 2007 recession. The current period (2024 and 2025) is not associated with a recession.

Colorado Employment and Change in Employment
Private vs. Government Employment

Colorado Employment YOY Change (000s)					
Industry Sector	Employment and Change				
Private and Government Sectors	Dec.2019	Mar. 2025	Mar. 2026	Dec. 2019 vs. Mar. 2026	Mar. 2025 vs. Mar. 2026
Total Employment	2,811.5	2,963.4	2,954.6	143.1	(8.8)
Private Employment	2,353.3	2,472.8	2,467.1	113.8	(5.7)
Government Employment	458.2	490.6	487.5	29.3	(3.1)

Highlights
Private vs. Government

In 2019, 16.3% of employment was in the government sector. It increased to 16.6% in 2026. From December 2019 to March 2026, 20.5% of the jobs added have been in the government sector. This raises the question, "Is the government sector growing too fast or is the private sector job growth stagnant?"

Summary of March 2026 Colorado Labor Market

- The Colorado labor market is weak. Private sector job losses are broad-based. YOY March employment shows that Colorado employment increased in three of the ten largest sectors. It increased in three of the nine smallest sectors/subsectors.
- Essential employment, such as healthcare, is the most relevant and likely to increase. Employment in sectors such as information or PBS is riskier. It is more susceptible to declines.
- Colorado was ranked 43rd for its YOY change in employment for March 2026. This occurred when the U.S. was not in a recession.
- In 2025, Colorado's real GDP was 2.1%, the same as the U.S. Colorado was ranked 17th for real GDP growth.

Source: BLS, SA, cber.co.

cber.co
Economic Outlook and Trends Through March, May 2026 Update.
Colorado and the United States

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Gary Horvath has produced annual employment forecasts of the state economy for over 30 years. They have been supplemented by monthly economic updates and indices that track economic performance over the short term. In addition, he has directed three statewide analyses that included reviews of all 64 county economies.

Horvath was the principal investigator for a state and federally funded project to prepare a nanotechnology roadmap for Colorado. As well, he was a co-founder of the Colorado Photonics Industry Association, a trade group for Colorado's photonics cluster. Horvath has been an active member of the group since its inception.

Horvath has also served on the Board of Directors for the Economic Development Council of Colorado, Northwest Denver Business Partnership, Adams County Regional Economic Partnership, and Broomfield Economic Development Corporation. Horvath has also been the chair of the electronics committee in the Governor's Office of Economic Development and International Trade early stage and proof of concept Advanced Industries grant program, and he served on the 2021 Colorado Legislative Redistricting Commission.