Economic Outlook and Trends Through July 2026

United States and Colorado

Colorado-based Business and Economic Research
cber.co
Prepared August 24, 2026

Economic Outlook and Trends

Purpose

This chartbook reviews the performance of the U.S. and Colorado economies. The primary emphasis is on trends in the Colorado labor market.

Summary of U.S. and Colorado Economies

U.S. Real Disposable Income per Capita is flat.

Real GDP growth is modest in the U.S. and Colorado.
Inflation has tapered off, more so in the U.S. than in Colorado.

Colorado retail sales growth is weak and below the U.S. rate.

Colorado population growth has slowed.

Employment growth has been weak, in part because of slow population growth.

In Q2, there were signs the slowdown has bottomed out. Change might be on the horizon. Colorado employment is expected to increase by 20,000 in 2026.

Contents

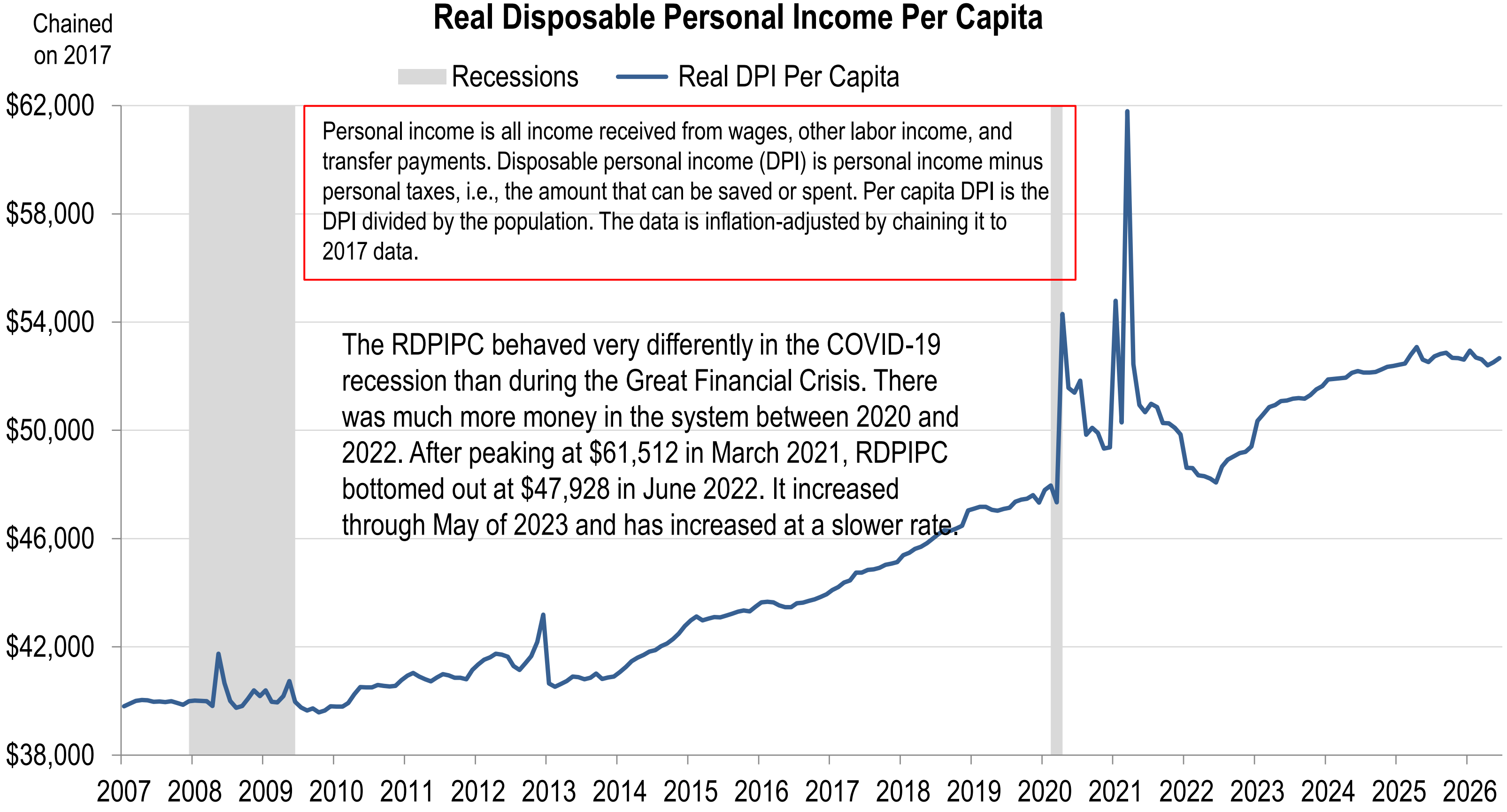
This chartbook addresses the following topics.

- Economic Outlook and Trends
- U.S. and Colorado Data
- United States and Colorado Employment and Unemployment
- Summary of Employment by Colorado High, Medium, and Low Wages
- Colorado Employment by Sectors with High Wages
- Colorado Employment by Sectors with Medium Wages
- Colorado Employment by Sectors with Low Wages
- Summary and Forecast

U.S. and Colorado Data

Real Disposable Personal Income Per Capita

United States



Real Disposable Personal Income Per Capita (RDPIPC)

In June 2026, the RDPIPC was $52,669. It was 0.3% better than the same period in 2025.

The monthly YOY change ranged from 0.4% to 2.1% in 2025 and -1.3% to 1.0% in 2026. Essentially, the change has been flat for two years. This is cause for concern.

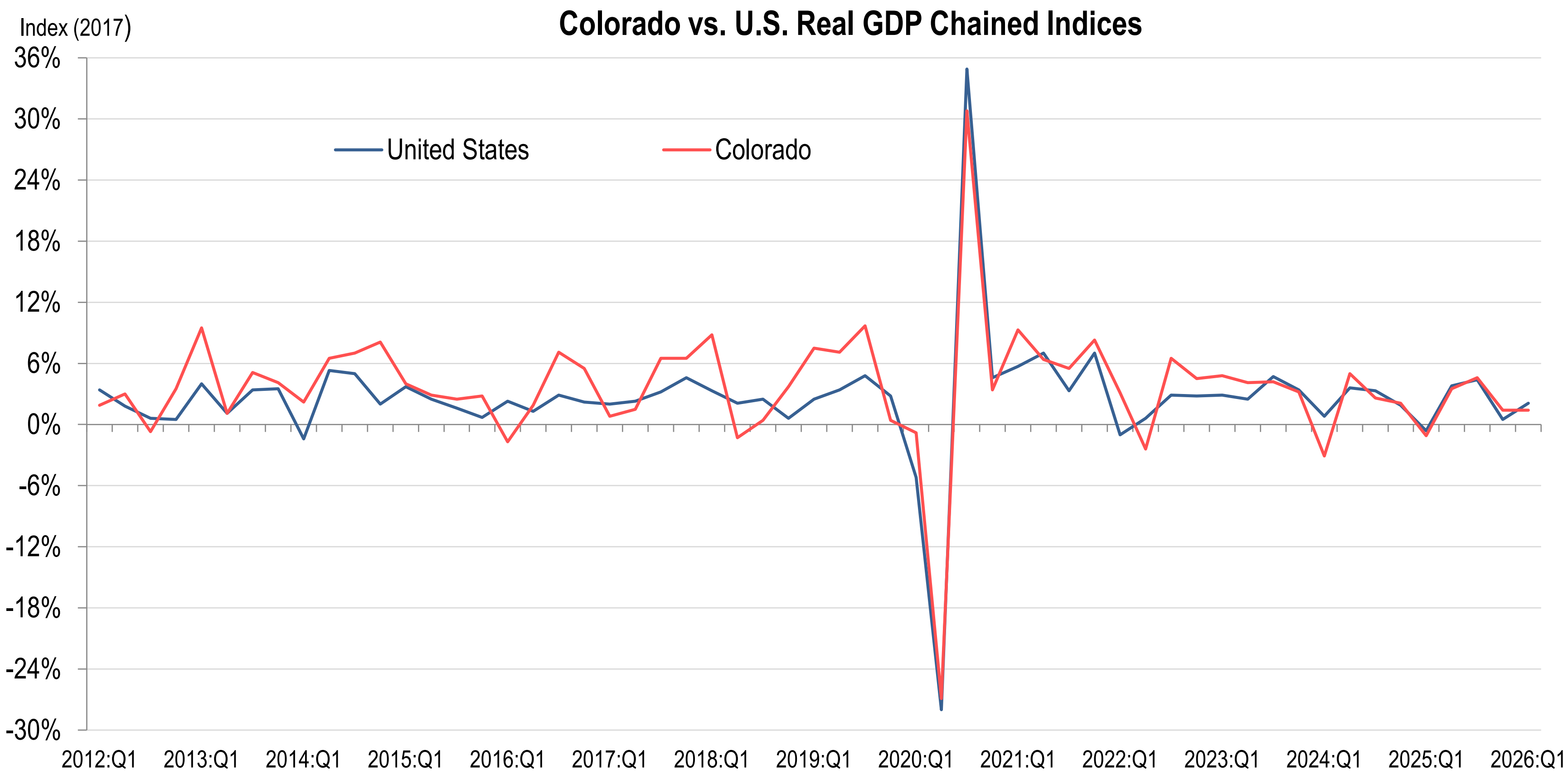
RDPIPC (Average)

Year	RDPIPC	% Change
2016	$43,659	1.1%
2017	$44,710	2.4%
2018	$46,057	3.0%
2019	$47,251	2.6%
2020	$50,062	5.9%
2021	$51,936	3.3%
2022	$48,714	-6.1%
2023	$51,077	4.2%
2024	$52,114	1.8%
2025	52,691	1.1%

Source: FRED, BEA, SAAR, chained on 2017 dollars, cber.co. Note that the RDPIPC was previously chained on 2012 data. In October 2024, revisions were made to data after 2019.

Real Gross Domestic Product

Colorado GDP vs. U.S. GDP Quarterly Growth Rate



Source: BEA, cber.co.

Colorado and U.S. Quarterly GDP Rate of Change

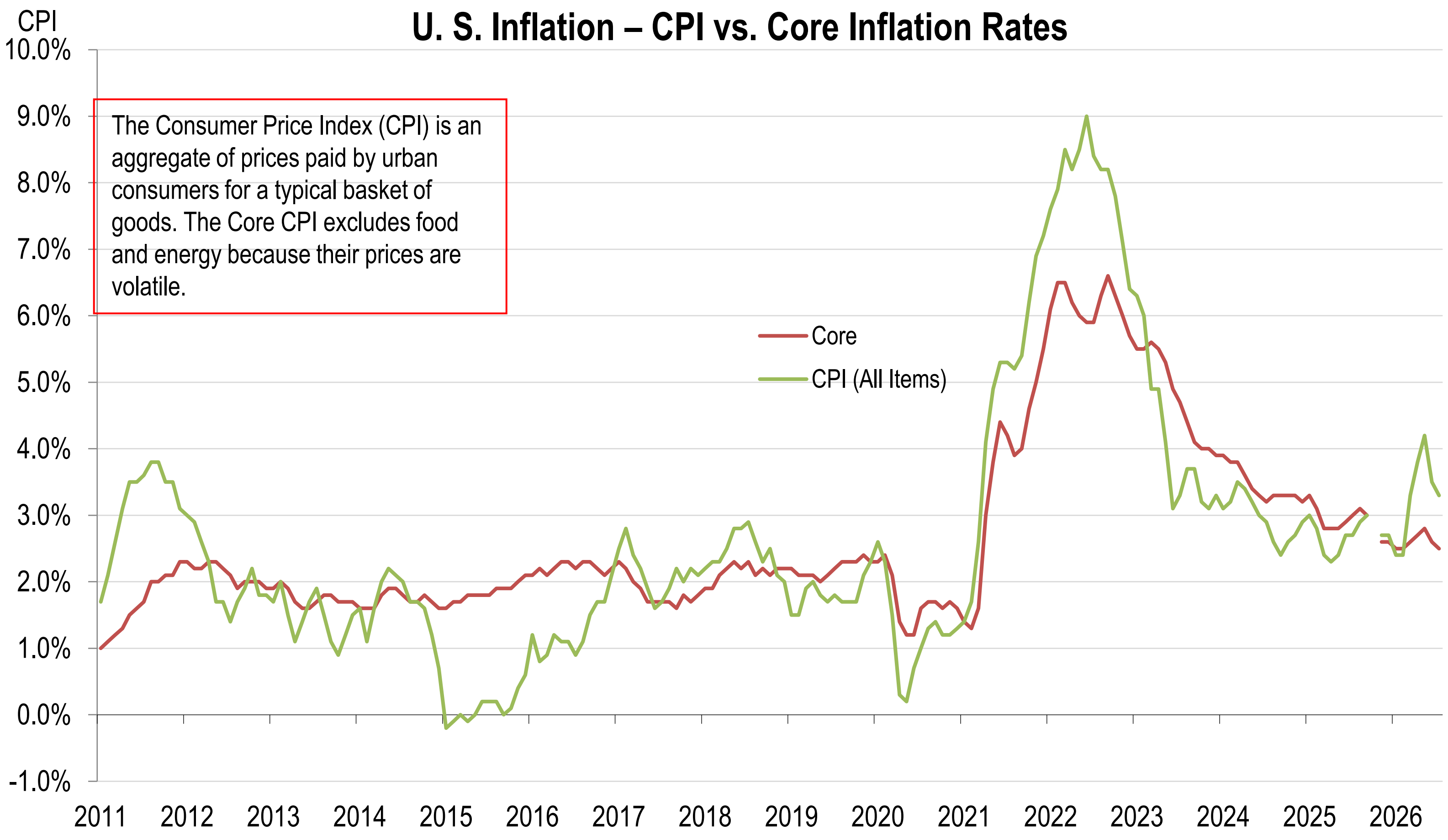
U.S. Real GDP growth for Q1 was 2.1%. It was 1.4% for Colorado.

Between 2012 and 2019, the U.S. Real GDP rate (blue) exceeded the Colorado GDP rate (red) in 8 of 31 quarters. This occurred because Colorado had a solid labor market and a diverse mix of industries. Things changed in 2020!

Since 2020, the U.S. Real GDP rate has been above the Colorado rate 11 times out of the past 25 quarters. In many quarters, their growth rates were similar.

This raises the question, “Did COVID-19-related policies bring about structural changes in the Colorado economy?”

CPI Inflation
U.S. CPI vs. Core Inflation



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Core Inflation is the CPI less food and energy; CPI All Items City Average SA, cber.co.

U.S. CPI vs. Core Inflation

The July 2026 U.S. CPI rate was 3.3%. The core rate was 2.5%. Housing and rent remained high, and gasoline prices declined. The rate is above the Fed's desired rate of 2.0%, but inflation is well below the rates of 2021 and 2023.

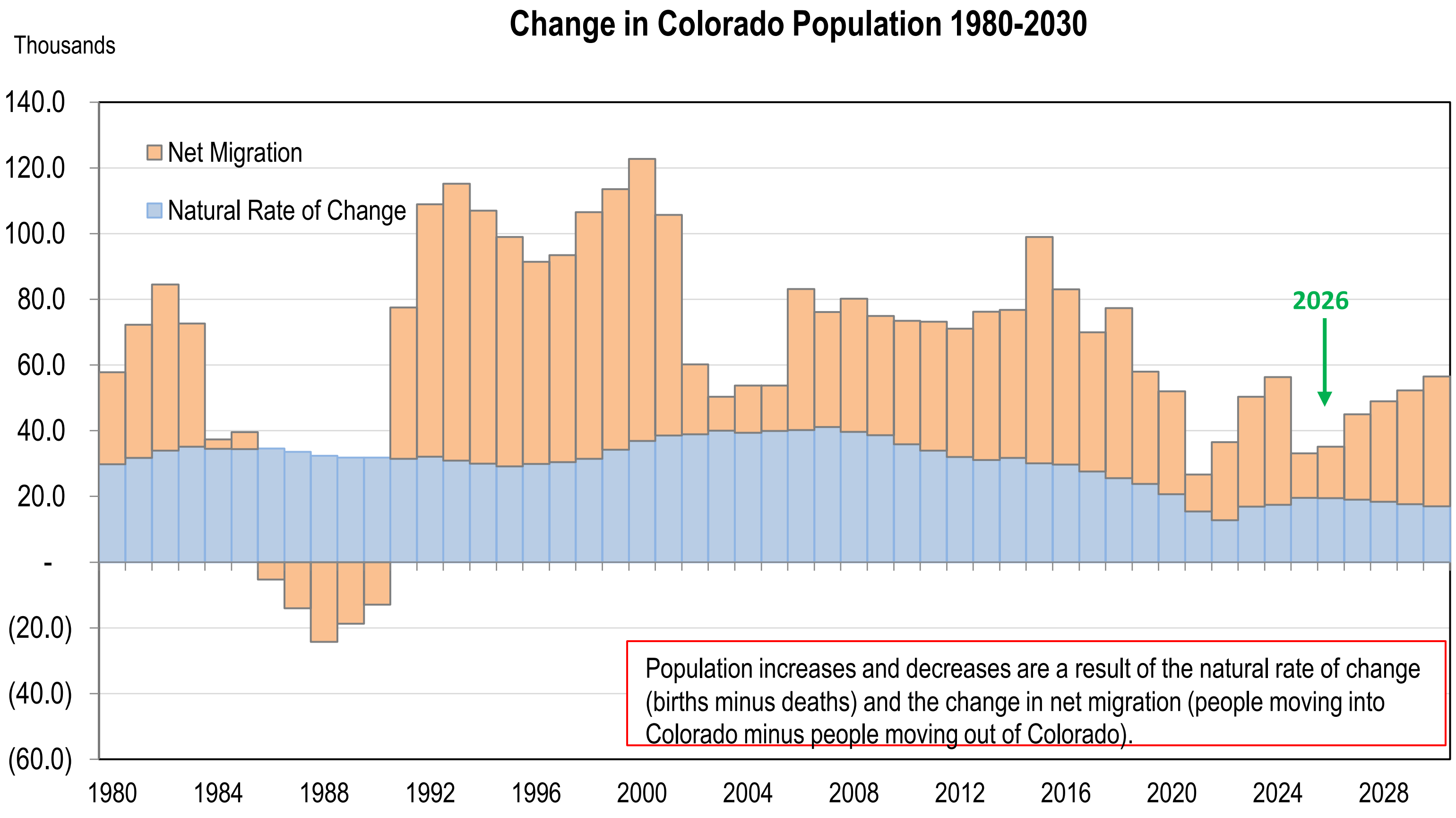
The October 2025 values were not reported because of the government shutdown.

U.S. and Denver Annual CPI and Core

Year	U.S.	U.S. Core	Denver	Denver Core
2015	0.1%	1.8%	1.2%	3.3%
2016	1.3%	2.2%	2.8%	4.0%
2017	2.1%	1.8%	3.4%	3.1%
2018	2.4%	2.1%	2.7%	2.5%
2019	1.8%	2.2%	1.9%	2.5%
2020	1.2%	1.7%	2.0%	2.3%
2021	4.7%	3.6%	3.5%	2.5%
2022	8.0%	6.2%	8.0%	7.1%
2023	4.1%	4.8%	5.2%	5.4%
2024	2.9%	3.4%	2.3%	2.7%
2025	2.6%	2.7%	2.3%	2.7%

Source: BLS, cber.co

Colorado Population
Components of Change



Components of Change

Since 2000, the Colorado population has increased at a decreasing rate. Changes have occurred because of higher death rates, lower fertility rates, altered migration patterns, pandemic-related policies, and the aging of the baby boomers.

There were significant declines in 2020 and 2021. International immigration decreased in 2025. It will likely decrease in 2026. In 2026, net migration will increase by 15,654, and the natural rate of change will be 19,458. The total gain will be 35,112 to 6,024,996.

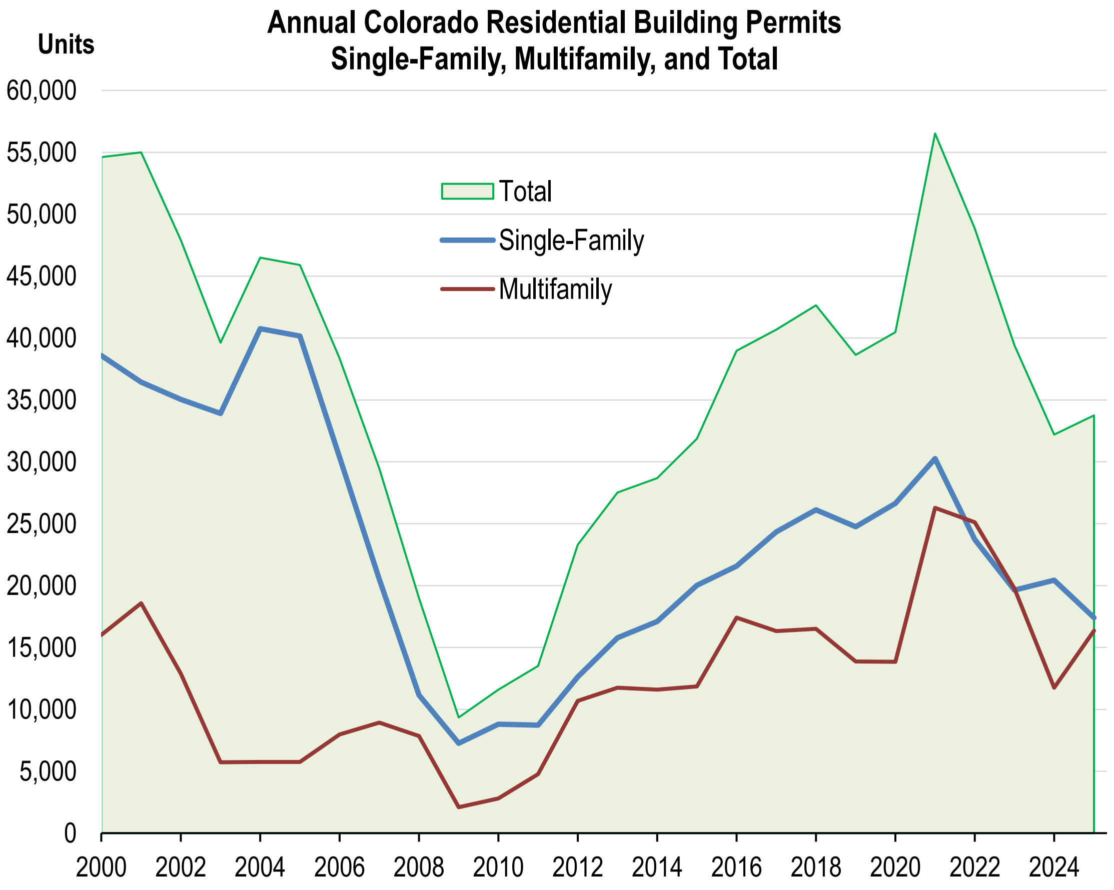
The natural rate of change and immigration levels were weak between 2021 and 2023; however, the population change was positive. Looking back, between 1985 and 1990, there were five years of negative net migration. As a result, the population decreased.

Currently, the slower population growth is one of several causes of slower job growth.

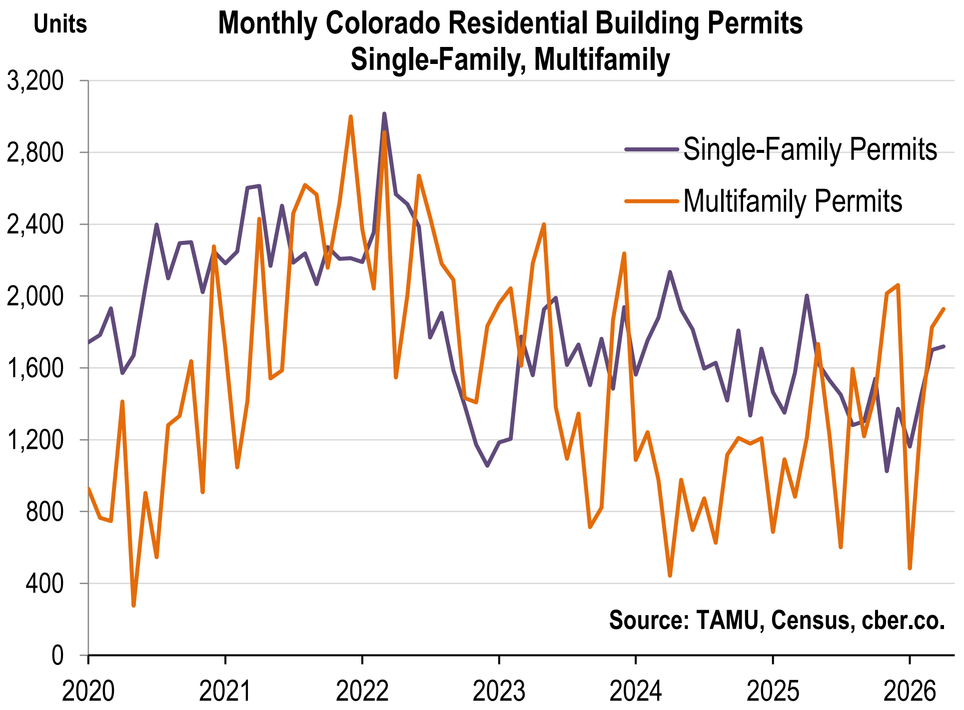
Sources: State Demography Office, January 2026, and cber.co. Note: The data reflects changes released at the 2025 Demography Summit.

Colorado Residential Building Permits

Single Family and Multifamily Units



Source: TAMU, Census Bureau, cber.co.

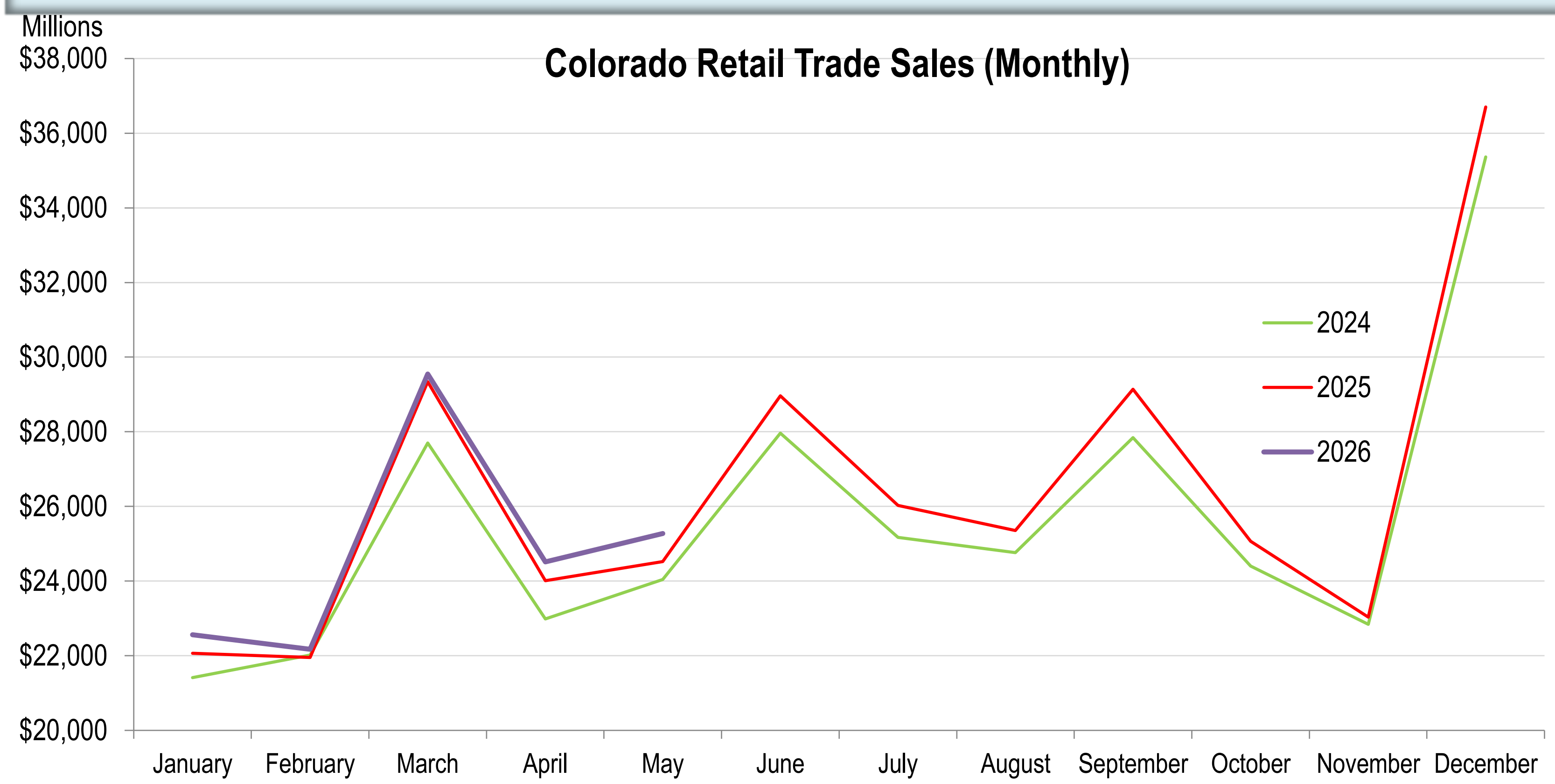


Above (Monthly): The total number of single-family permits for the first 6 months of 2026 changed by –3.4% (purple) compared to the same period in 2024. Multifamily permits changed by +13.6% (orange). Total unit permits for 2026 were 16,984, up 3.7% compared to the same period in 2025

Left (Annual): Over the past 25 years, the total number of permits (green) has ranged from 9,355 units in 2009 to 56,524 in 2021. There is currently a shortage of affordable housing. Permits are not being issued, and demand is not being met.

Colorado Retail Trade Sales

Monthly



Colorado Retail Trade Sales

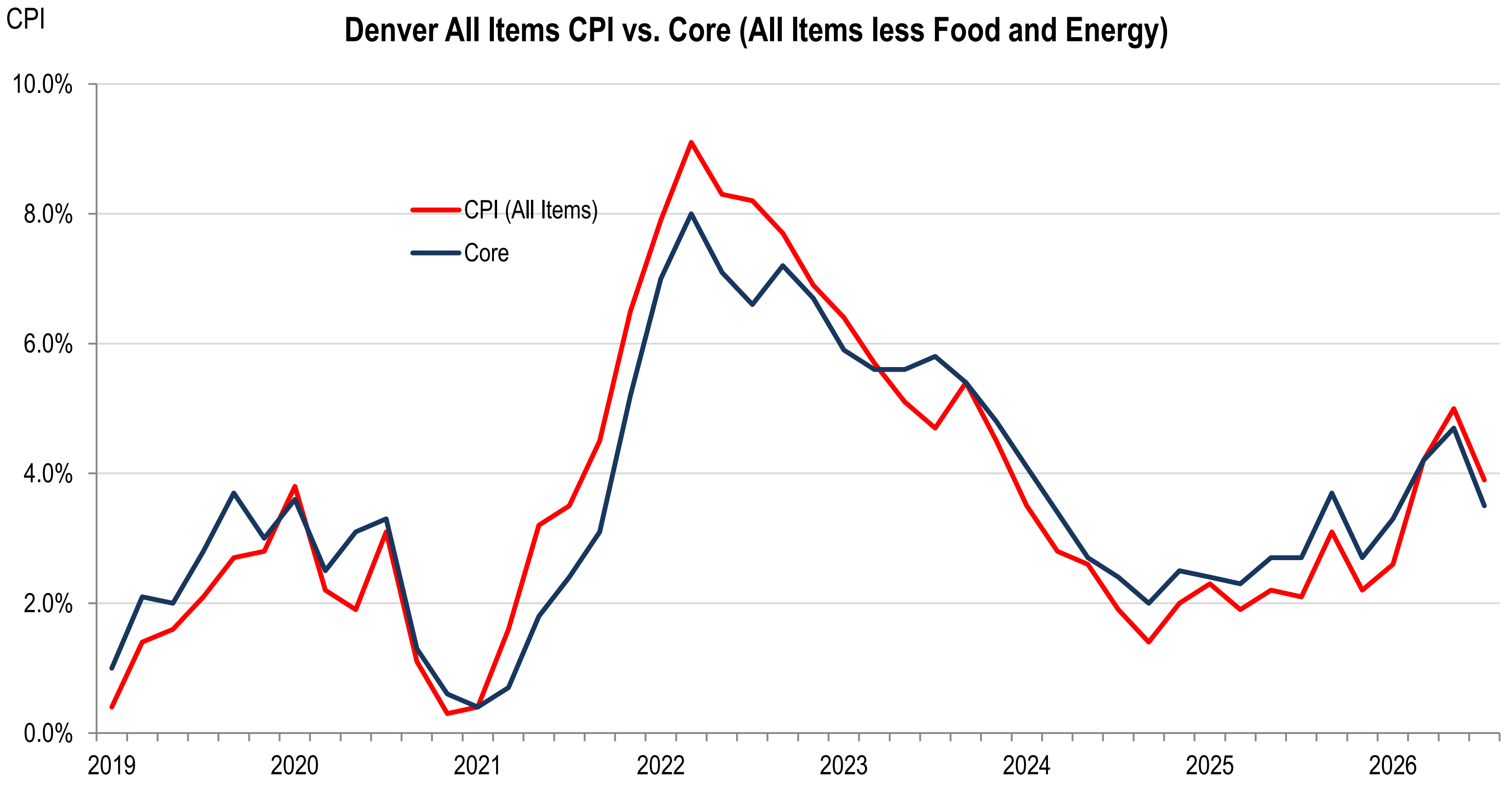
Retail sales growth was comparatively weak in 2023 and 2024. In 2025 (red), sales increased by 3.2% compared to 2024.

Sales through May 2026 were 1.79% more than the same period in 2025 (purple).

Annual Retail Sales (Billions)		
2017	$194.6	5.4%
2018	$206.2	5.9%
2019	$224.6	9.0%
2020	$228.8	1.9%
2021	$268.3	17.3%
2022	$299.9	11.8%
2023	$302.6	0.9%
2024	$306.5	1.3%
2025	$316.2	3.2%

Source: Colorado Department of Revenue, https://cdor.colorado.gov/retail-sales-reports, cber.co. Note: Not adjusted for inflation.

Bi-Monthly Change in Denver-Aurora-Lakewood CPI
All Items vs. Core



Denver-Aurora-Lakewood CPI vs. Core Inflation

The Denver CPI rate for July 2026 (red) was 3.9%, and the core rate was 3.5%. The rate slowed in July.

On a positive note, the inflation rate is lower than in 2021 and 2022.

Energy costs declined; however, housing and medical costs remained high.

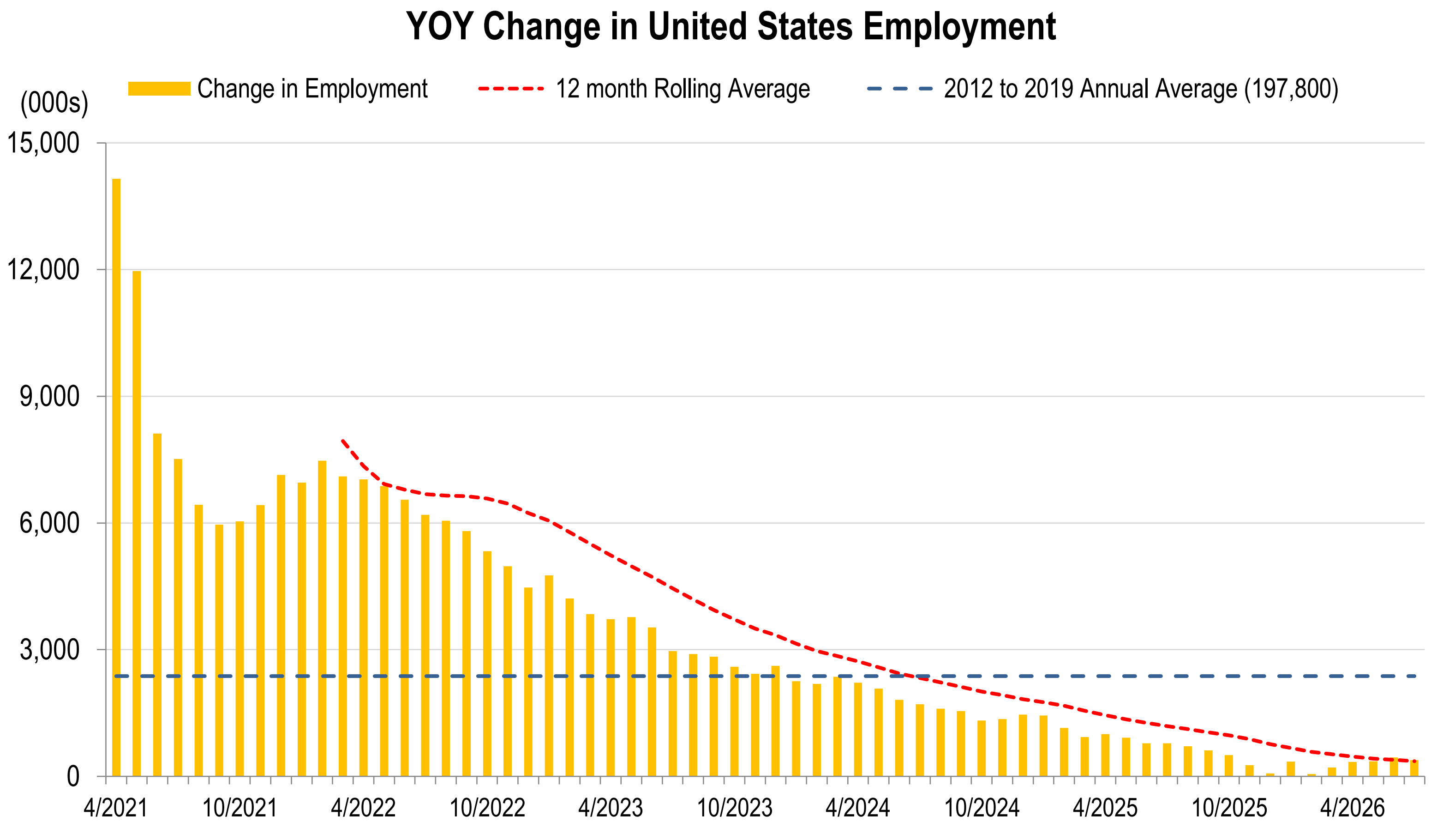
Note that the Denver rate is only published bi-monthly and is NSA.

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, CPI All Items, NSA, Note: Colorado NSA data is only available on a bi-monthly basis since 2019, cber.co.

U.S. and Colorado Employment and Unemployment

YOY Change in Employment

United States



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

Change in U.S. Employment

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

The MOM change in U.S. employment was -23,000 in July 2026 (not shown).

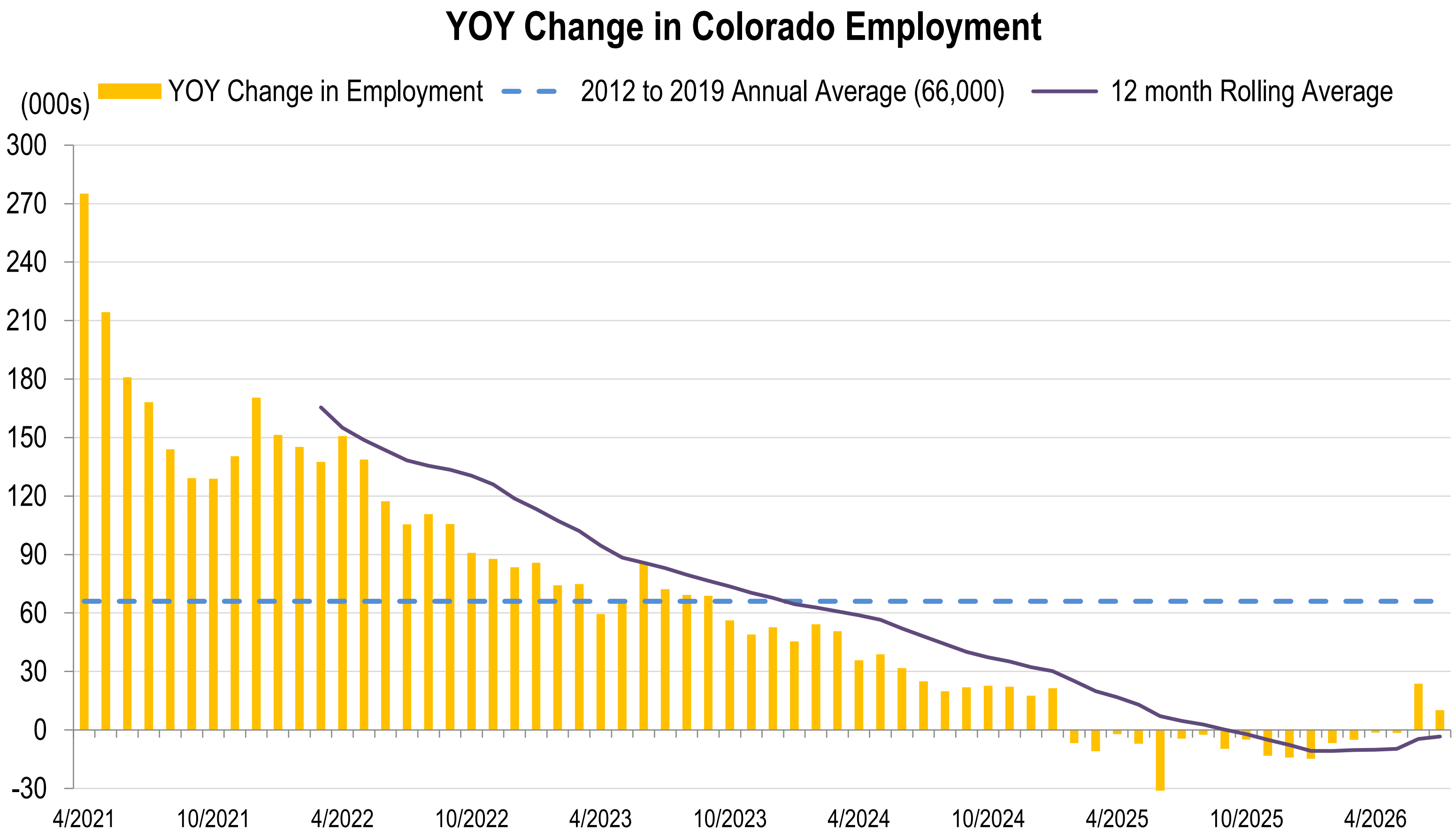
In April 2021, the YOY change in annual employment was positive for the first time after the pandemic (yellow bars). It was 14.1 million. It trended downward to 382,000 in July 2026.

The 12-month rolling average (red dotted line) peaked at 7.9 million in March 2022. It has trended downward to 359,000 in July 2026. Based on that value, average monthly employment growth has been 29,900.

No matter how you look at it, the U.S. employment situation is weak. On a positive note, it seems likely that the labor market has bottomed out. The tide may be turning.

YOY Change in Employment

Colorado



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

Change in Colorado Employment

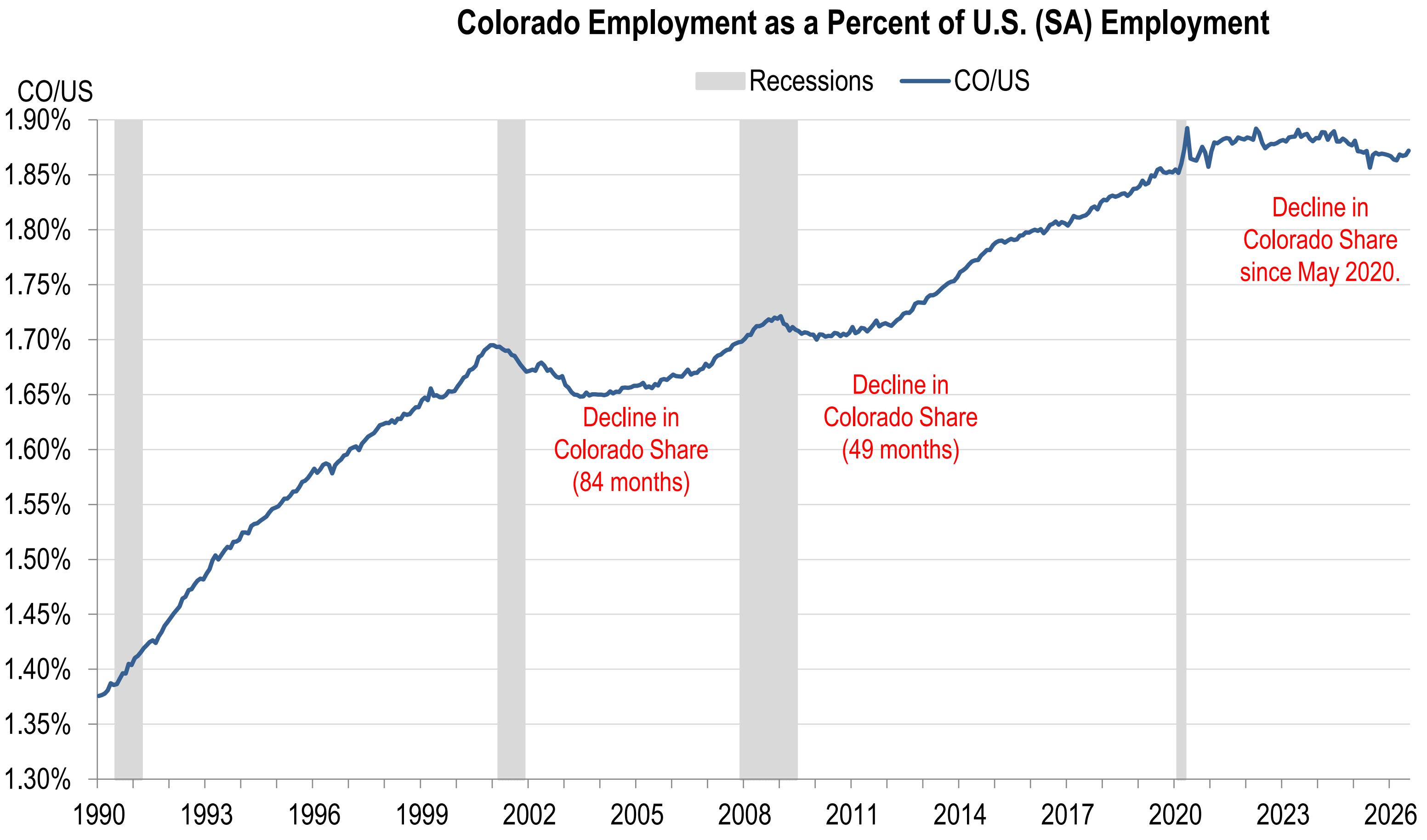
From 2012 to 2019, average annual NSA employment in Colorado was 66,000 (blue dotted line). The average monthly change was 5,500.

April 2021 was the first month after the pandemic when the change in YOY employment was positive (275,200).

The YOY value (yellow bars) was negative between February 2025 and May 2026. It was 23,700 in June 2026 and 10,200 in July.

In March 2022, the 12-month rolling average (purple solid line) peaked at 165,475. It trended downward until it reached -10,700 in January and February 2026. It has since improved and was -4,600 in June and -3,400 in July.

Colorado Employment as a Percent of U.S. Employment



Colorado Employment as a Percent 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. When the percentage declines, it indicates the Colorado labor market is growing more slowly than the U.S. labor market. Colorado employment has grown more slowly than the U.S. economy since May 2020.

The first trough began at 1.69%. It was at or below that value for 84 months, from September 2000 to August 2007.

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

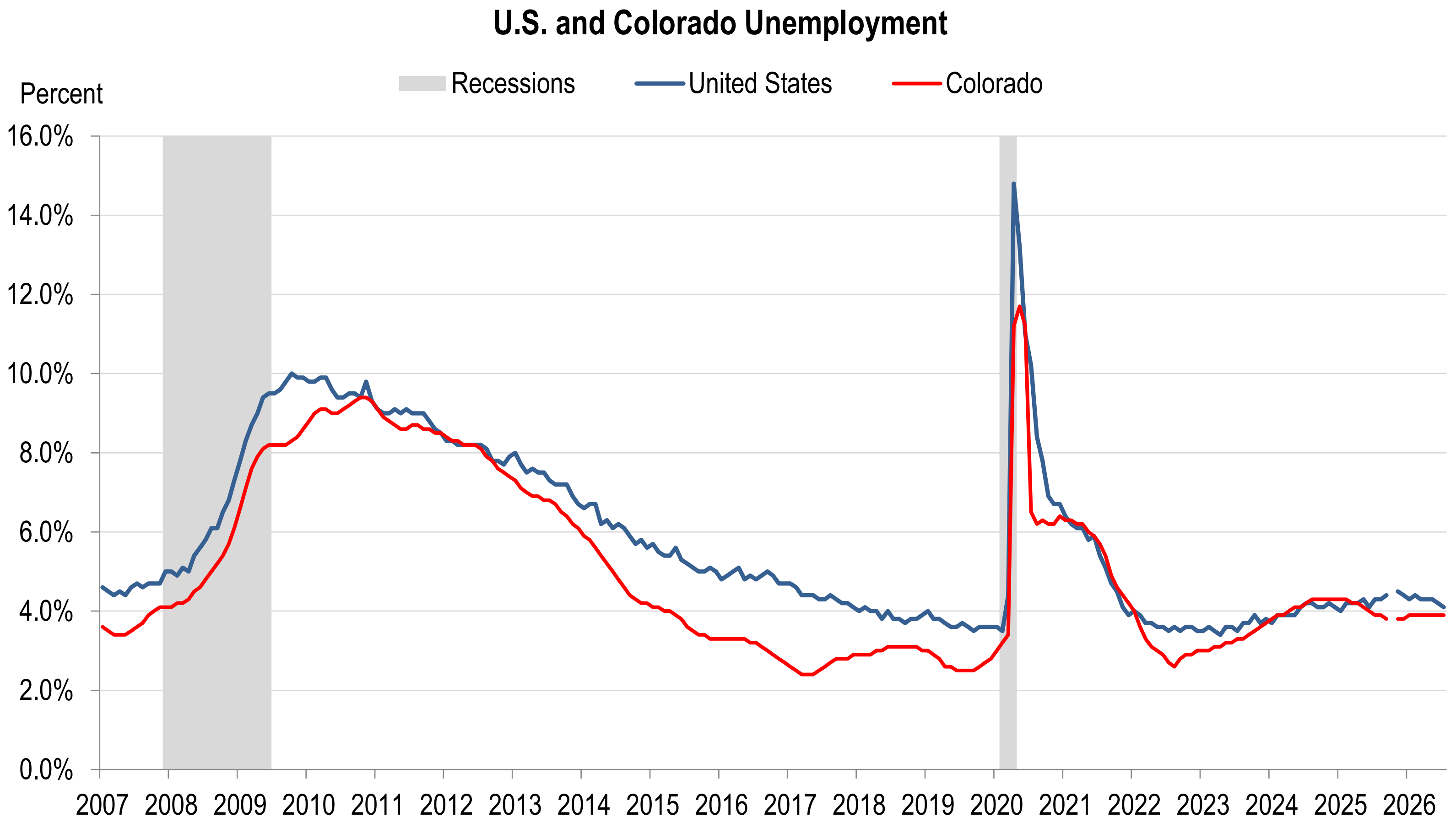
The third trough began at 1.89% (May 2020). The Colorado share has been at or below that value since then. In July 2026, Colorado's employment was 1.87% of U.S. employment.

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

.

Unemployment Rate

United States and Colorado



Source: BLS, SA, cber.co.

Unemployment Rate

The Colorado unemployment rate (red line) was 3.9% in July 2026. The U.S. rate (blue line) was 4.1%.

Since 2007, Colorado's unemployment rate was less than the U.S. rate about 90% of the time.

Colorado's annual unemployment rate was lower than the U.S. rate every year between 2016 and 2025.

Annual Unemployment Rate

Year	United States	Colorado
2016	4.9%	3.1%
2017	4.4%	2.6%
2018	3.9%	3.0%
2019	3.7%	2.7%
2020	8.1%	6.8%
2021	5.3%	5.5%
2022	3.6%	3.1%
2023	3.6%	3.3%
2024	4.0%	4.1%
2025	4.3%	4.0%

Summary of Colorado Employment by High, Medium, and Low Wages

Employment by Wage Category

This section analyzes changes in sector employment by high, medium, and low-wage groups from January 2019 to July 2026. It focuses on changes in the percentage or share of total employment. Wage groups are based on QCEW wages.

High-Wage Sectors – In 2019, this group had 25.80% of employment. Its share dropped slightly to 25.67%. PST was a major driver of the overall economy, adding 61,800 jobs, followed by MCE, which added 6,000 jobs. Two sectors added jobs, but lost share. The bottom three sectors lost jobs and share. The high-wage group added 51,200 jobs during this period.

Middle-Wage Sectors – In 2019, this group had 40.48% of employment. Its share increased to 42.13%. Healthcare dominated job growth, adding 62,700 jobs. Four of the six sectors added market share. Construction added jobs, but lost share, and manufacturing lost jobs and share. The middle-wage group added 135,400 jobs during this period.

Low-Wage Sectors – In 2019, these sectors accounted for 33.72% of employment. In 2026, that percent had declined to 32.21%. Other services added 18,500 jobs and added share. AER and private education also added jobs and share. The AFS, retail trade, and administrative services lost share over this period. The latter two also declined in total employment. Only 26,800 jobs were added from sectors in this group during this period.

Total All Sectors

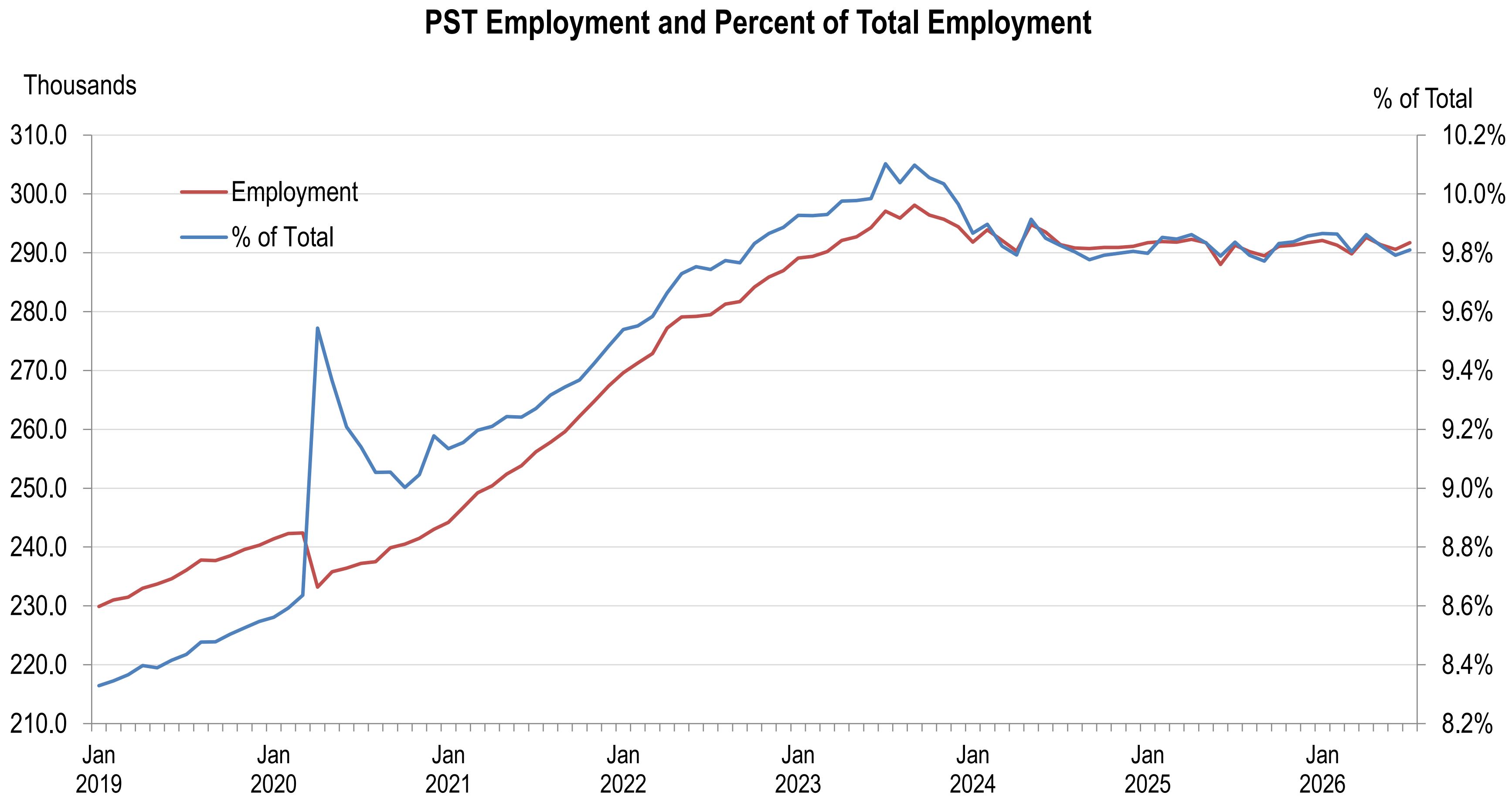
Colorado employment increased by 213,400 between January 2019 and July 2026. That is an average increase of 2,371 or an annual total of 28,453. Since January 2019, about 124,500, or 58.3%, of jobs added were in Healthcare and PST. About 37,900, or 17.8%, of jobs added were in state and local government.

Percent of Employment by Wage Category						
Source: BLS, cber.co	**Employment**			**Percentage Total**		
	Jan. 2019	**July 2026**	**Change**	**Jan. 2019**	**July 2026**	**Difference**
High-Wage Sectors	**(000s)**	**(000s)**	**(000s)**	**% of Total**	**% of Total**	**in Share**
Professional, Scientific, and Technical (PST)	229.9	291.7	61.8	8.33%	9.81%	1.48%
Management of Corp./Enterprises (MCE)	41.5	47.5	6.0	1.50%	1.60%	0.09%
Financial Activities	173.1	175.0	1.9	6.27%	5.88%	-0.39%
Wholesale Trade	109.1	114.1	5.0	3.95%	3.84%	-0.12%
Information	76.5	64.7	-11.8	2.77%	2.18%	-0.60%
Federal Government	52.7	50.1	-2.6	1.91%	1.68%	-0.22%
Extractive Industries	29.3	20.2	-9.1	1.06%	0.68%	-0.38%
Total High-Wage Sectors	712.1	763.3	51.2	25.80%	25.67%	-0.13%
Middle-Wage Sectors						
Healthcare	301.8	364.5	62.7	10.93%	12.26%	1.32%
Local Government	269	290.2	21.2	9.75%	9.76%	0.01%
State Government	128.2	144.9	16.7	4.64%	4.87%	0.23%
Transportation, Warehousing, and Utilities	92.2	119.2	27.0	3.34%	4.01%	0.67%
Construction	176.8	189.5	12.7	6.41%	6.37%	-0.03%
Manufacturing	149.3	144.4	-4.9	5.41%	4.86%	-0.55%
Total Middle-Wage Sectors	1,117.3	1,252.7	135.4	40.48%	42.13%	1.65%
Low-Wage Sectors						
Other Services (Personal)	112.2	130.7	18.5	4.06%	4.395%	0.330%
Arts, Entertainment, Recreation (AER)	57.8	62.6	4.8	2.094%	2.105%	0.011%
Education (Private)	42.5	49.8	7.3	1.540%	1.675%	0.135%
Accommodation and Food (AFS)	285.1	294.5	9.4	10.329%	9.903%	-0.425%
Retail Trade	274.2	269.3	-4.9	9.934%	9.056%	-0.878%
Administrative Services	159.1	150.8	-8.3	5.764%	5.071%	-0.693%
Total Low-Wage Sectors	930.9	957.7	26.8	33.72%	32.21%	-1.520%
Total All Sectors	2.760.3	2973.7	213.4	100.00%	100.00%	

Colorado Employment by Sectors with High Average Wages

Colorado Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services

Employment and Percent of Total Employment



Source: BLS, monthly SA, cber.co.

PST Employment

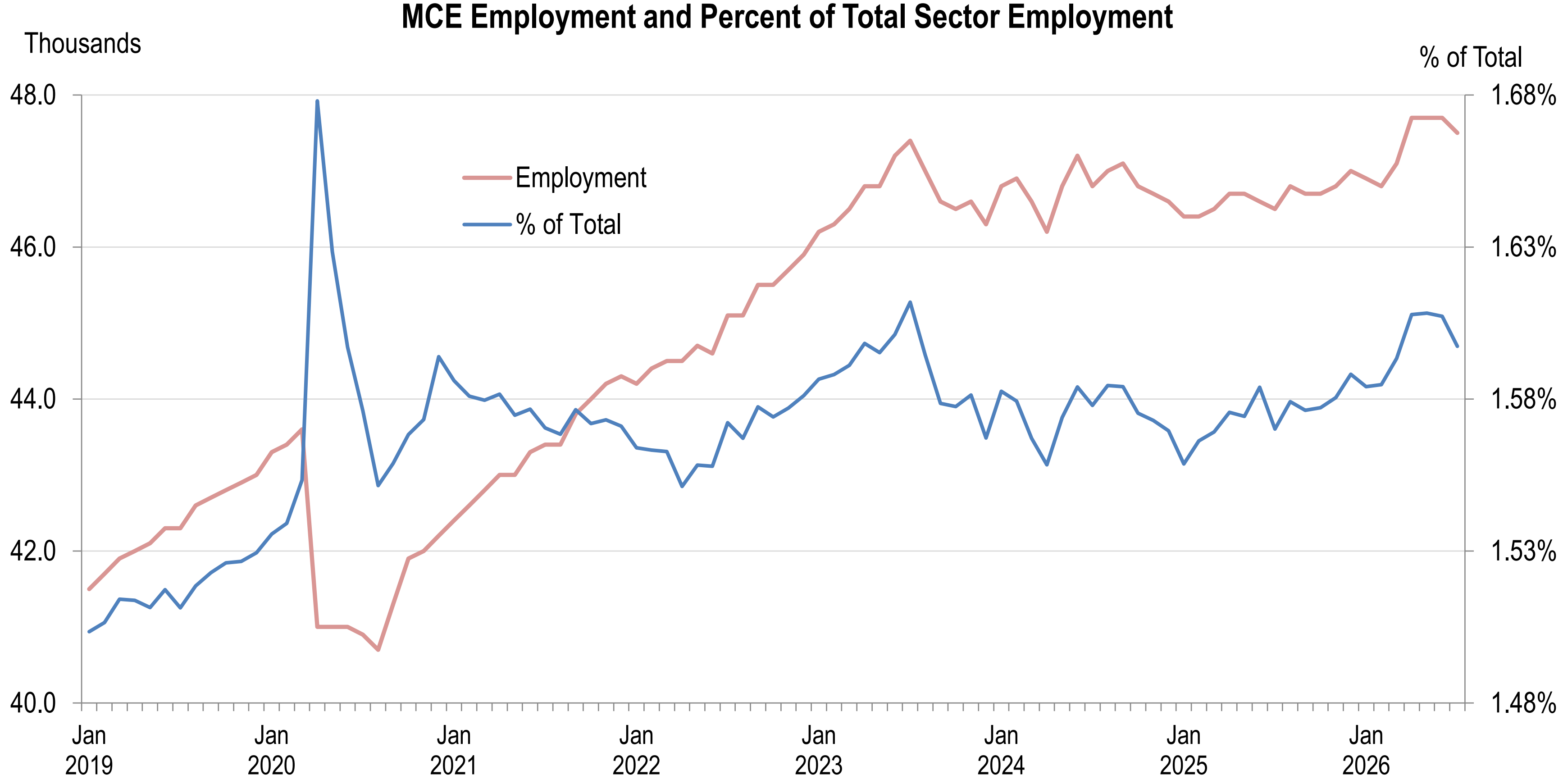
Employment increased from 229,900 in January 2019 to 291,700 in July 2026 (red). It peaked in September 2023 at 298,100, then tapered off and has been flat since Q1 2024.

PST employment is critical to Colorado. Many PST companies are part of the Colorado high-tech clusters.

In January 2019, sector employment was 8.33% of total employment (blue). It rose to 10.10% of total employment in July 2023. It was 9.81% in July 2026.

Colorado Management of Companies and Enterprises

Employment and Percent of Total Employment



Source: BLS, monthly SA, cber.co.

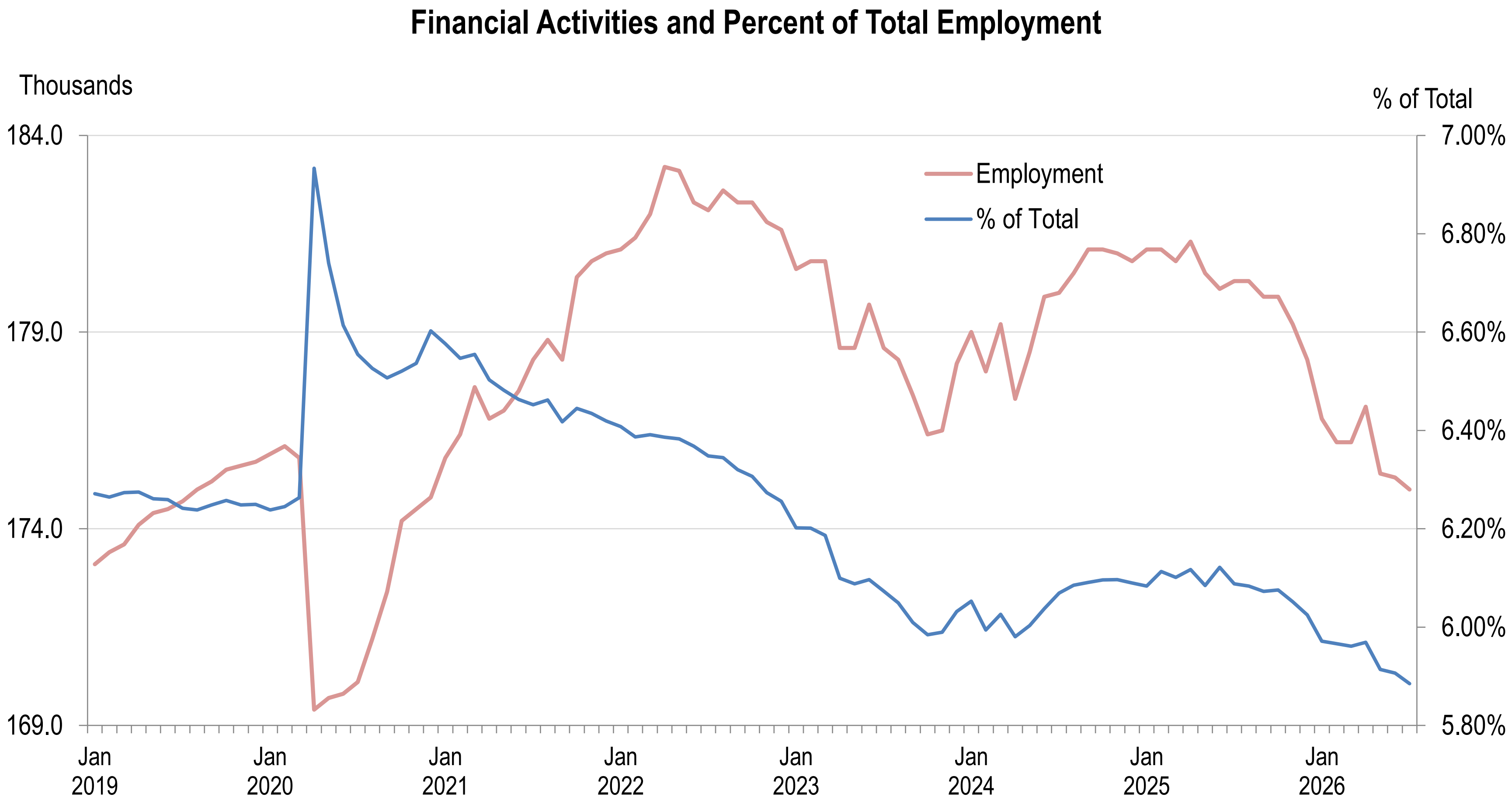
MCE Employment

Employment increased from 41,500 in January 2019 to 47,500 in July 2026 (red). Employment for July 2026 is down from the peak in May and June 2026.

In January 2019, sector employment was 1.50% of total employment (blue). It was 1.60% in July 2026. Since August 2020, the sector's percent of employment has ranged between 1.54% and 1.61%.

Colorado Financial Activities

Employment and Percent of Total Employment



Source: BLS, monthly SA, cber.co.

Financial Activities Employment

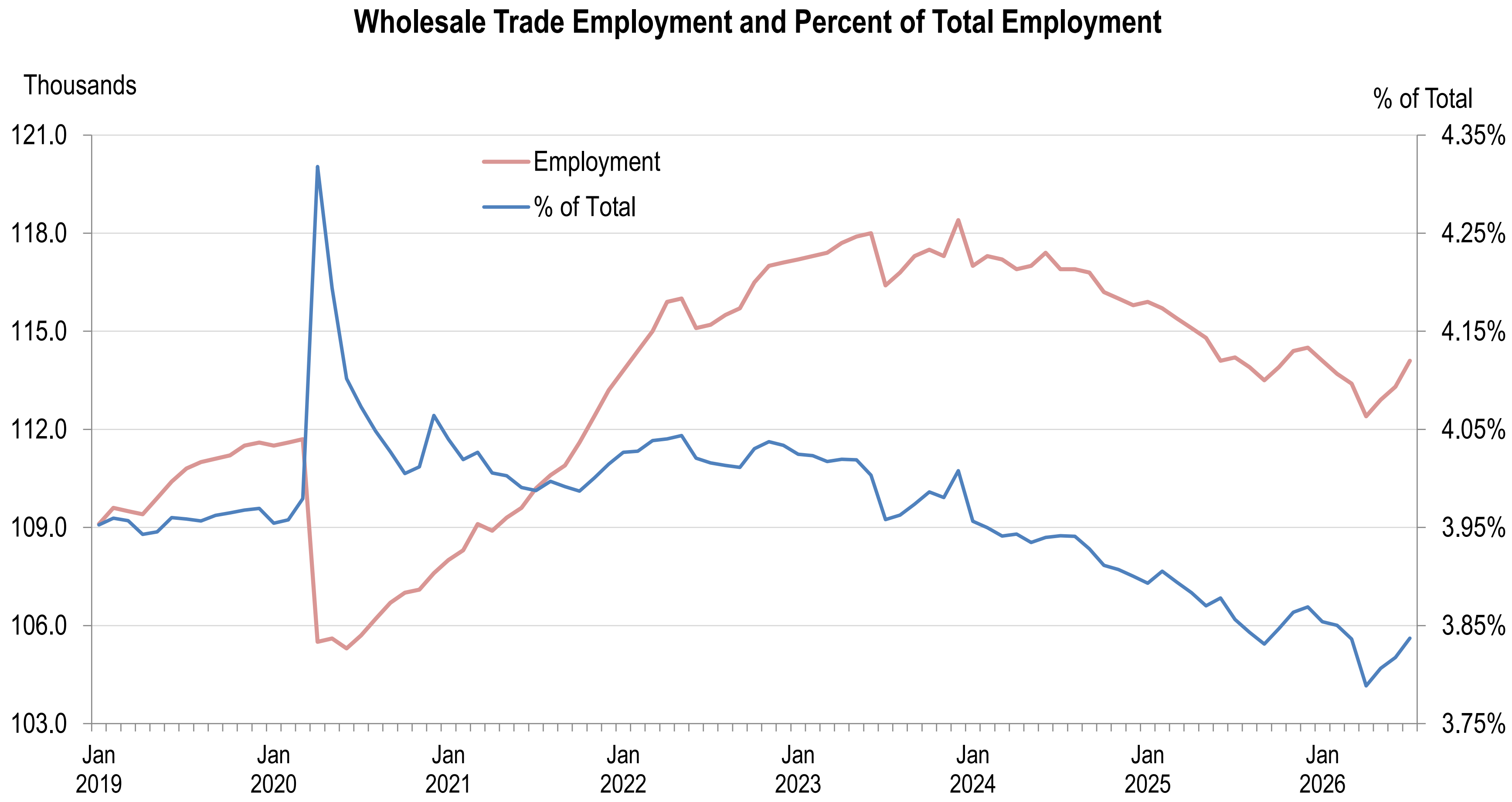
Employment increased from 173,100 in January 2019 to 175,000 in July 2026 (red). Current employment is below the 2022 peak of 1l83,100.

In January 2019, sector employment was 6.27% of total employment (blue). It rose to 6.90% in April 2020. It was 5.88% in July 2026.

Financial activities employment has decreased as a percent of total employment since the COVID-19 recession.

Colorado Wholesale Trade

Employment and Percent of Total Employment



Source: BLS, monthly SA, cber.co.

Wholesale Trade Employment

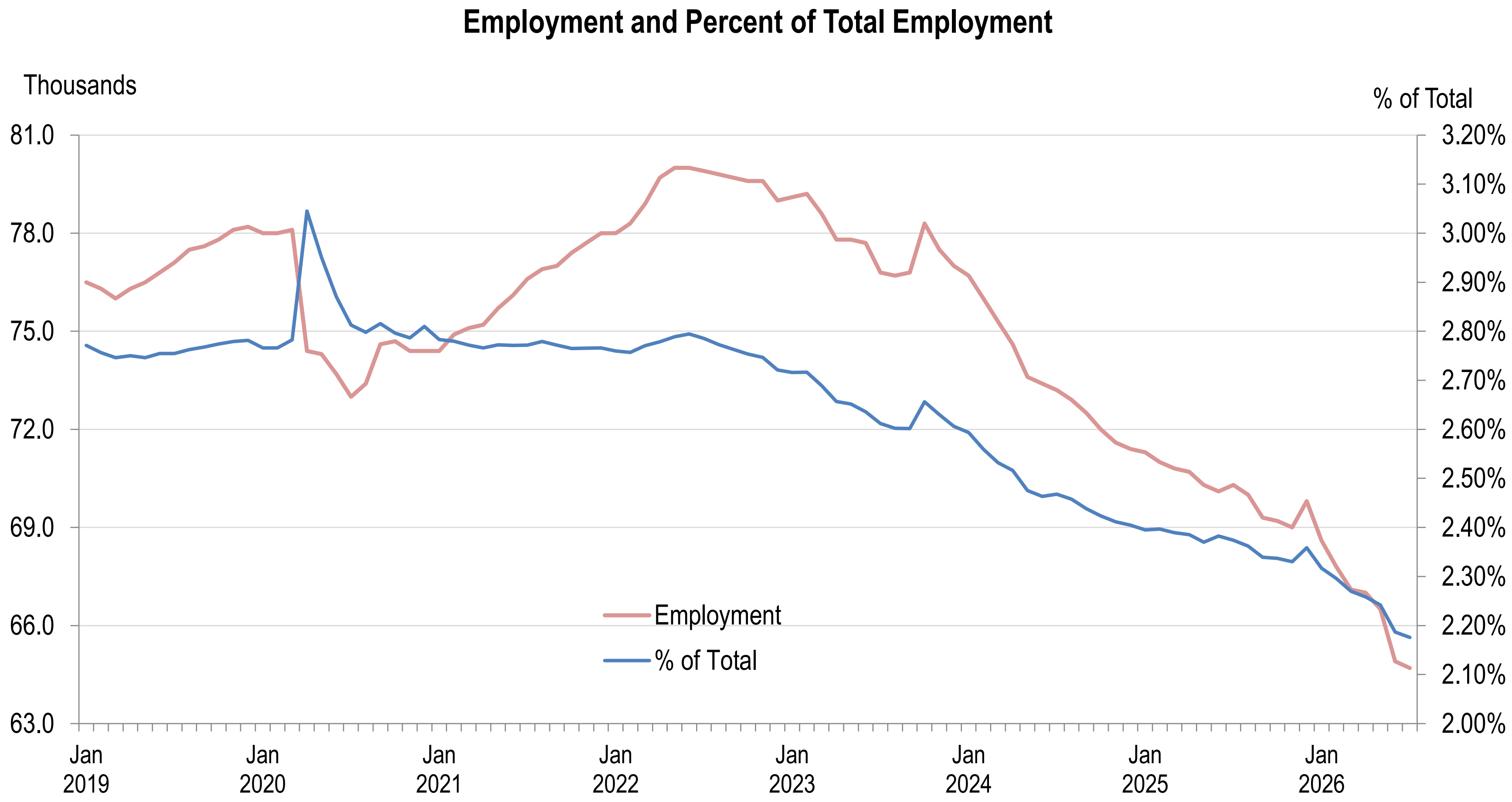
Employment increased from 109,100 in January 2019 to 114,100 in July 2026 (red). It peaked at 118,400 in December 2023.

In January 2019, sector employment was 3.95% of total employment (blue). It peaked at 4.32% in April 2020 and was 3.84% in July 2026.

Wholesale trade has decreased as a percent of total employment since the COVID-19 recession.

Colorado Information

Employment and Percent of Total Employment



Source: BLS, monthly SA, cber.co.

Information Employment

Employment decreased from 76,500 in January 2019 to 64,700 in July 2026 (red). It peaked at 80,000 in June 2022.

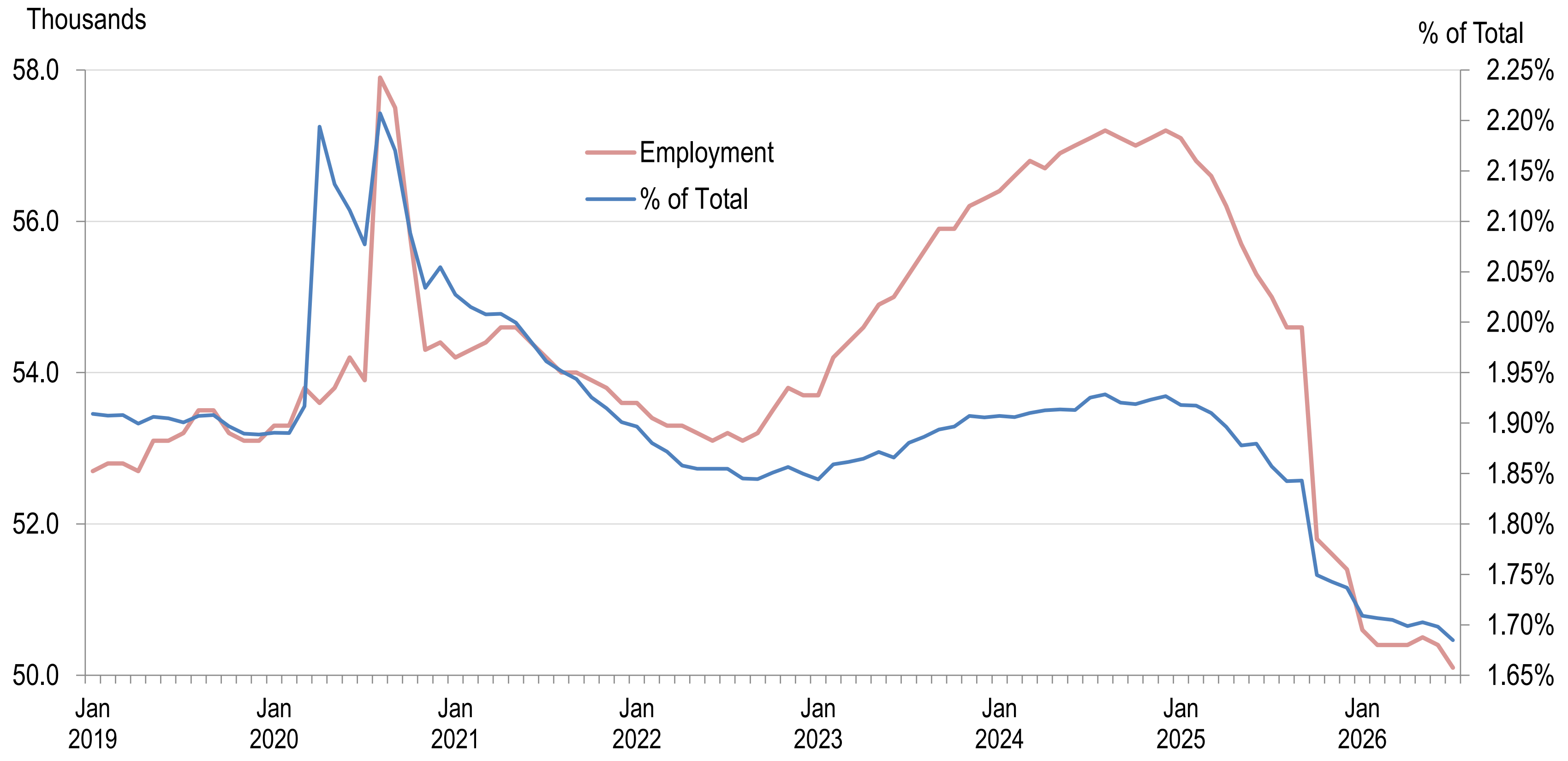
The decline is a concern because some high-technology companies are in this sector.

In January 2019, sector employment was 2.77% of total employment (blue). It peaked at 3.05% in April 2020. It was 2.18% in July 2026.

Colorado Federal Government

Employment and Percent of Total Employment

Federal Government and Percent of Total Sector Employment



Source: BLS, monthly SA, cber.co.

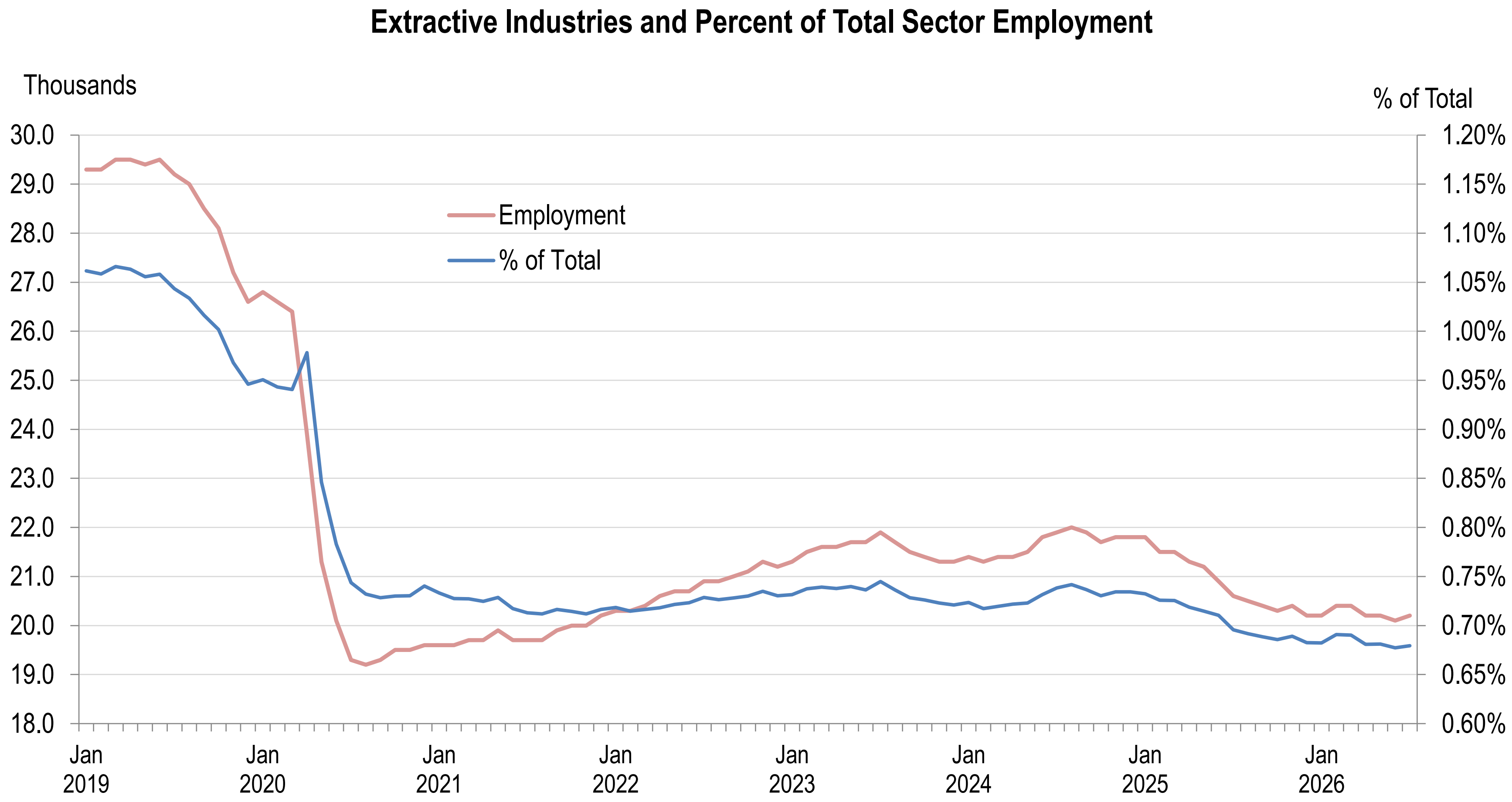
Federal Government Employment
Employment decreased from 52,700 in January 2019 to 50,100 in July 2026 (red). It peaked at 57,900 in August 2020.

Historically, employment in the sector is volatile. As has happened before, recent declines were caused by reduced federal funding.

In January 2019, sector employment was 1.91% of total employment (blue). It was 1.68% in July 2026. It peaked at 2.21% in August 2020.

Colorado Extractive Industries

Employment and Percent of Total Employment



Source: BLS, monthly SA, cber.co.

Extractive Industries Employment

Employment decreased from 29,300 in January 2019 to 20,200 in July 2026 (red).

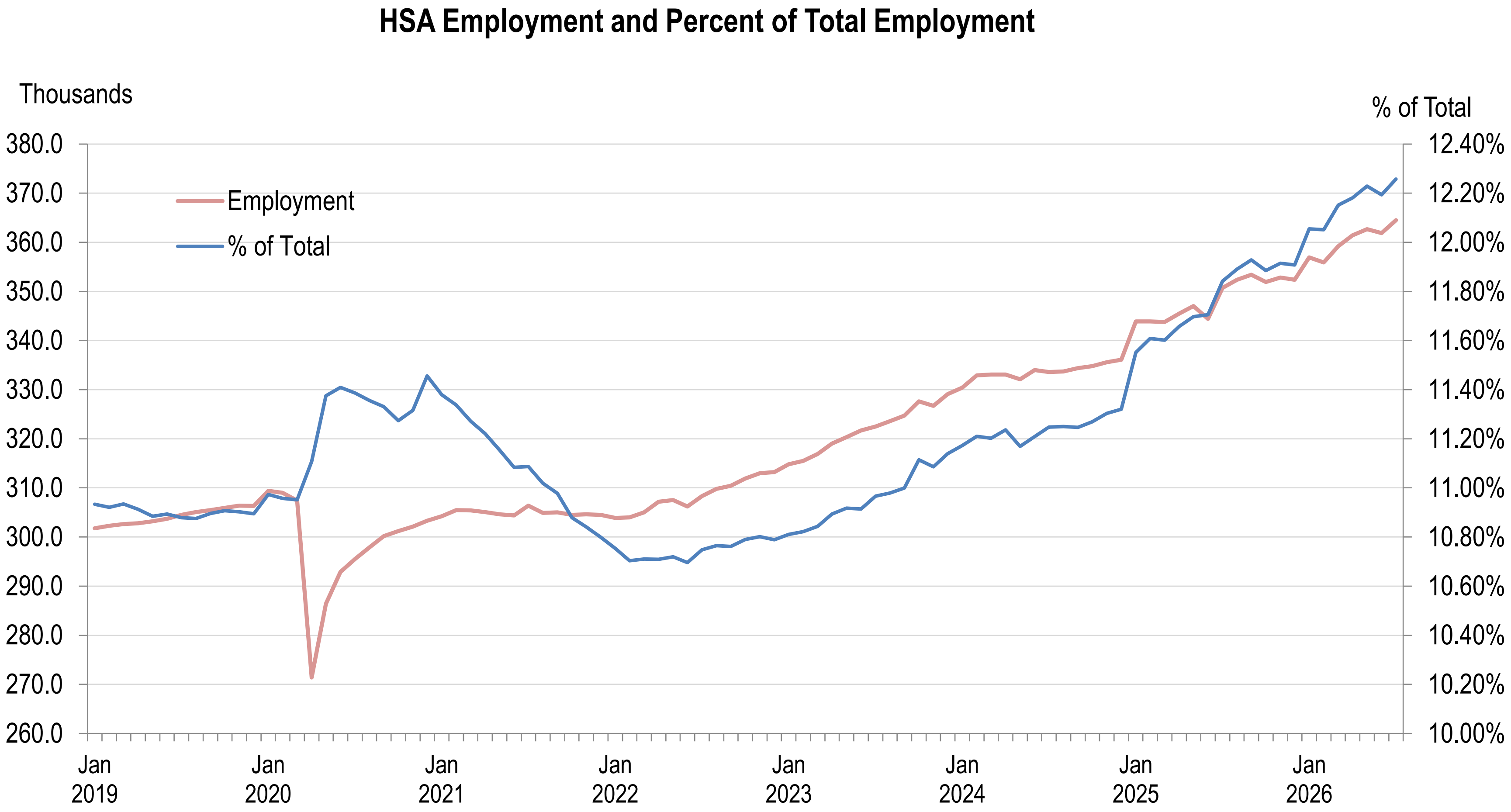
The decline in employment was caused by state regulations and legislation, along with reduced travel associated with COVID-19-related policies.

In January 2019, sector employment was 1.06% of total employment (blue). It was 0.68% in June 2026.

Colorado Employment by Sectors with Medium Average Wages

Colorado Healthcare and Social Assistance

Employment and Percent of Total Employment



Source: BLS, monthly SA, cber.co.

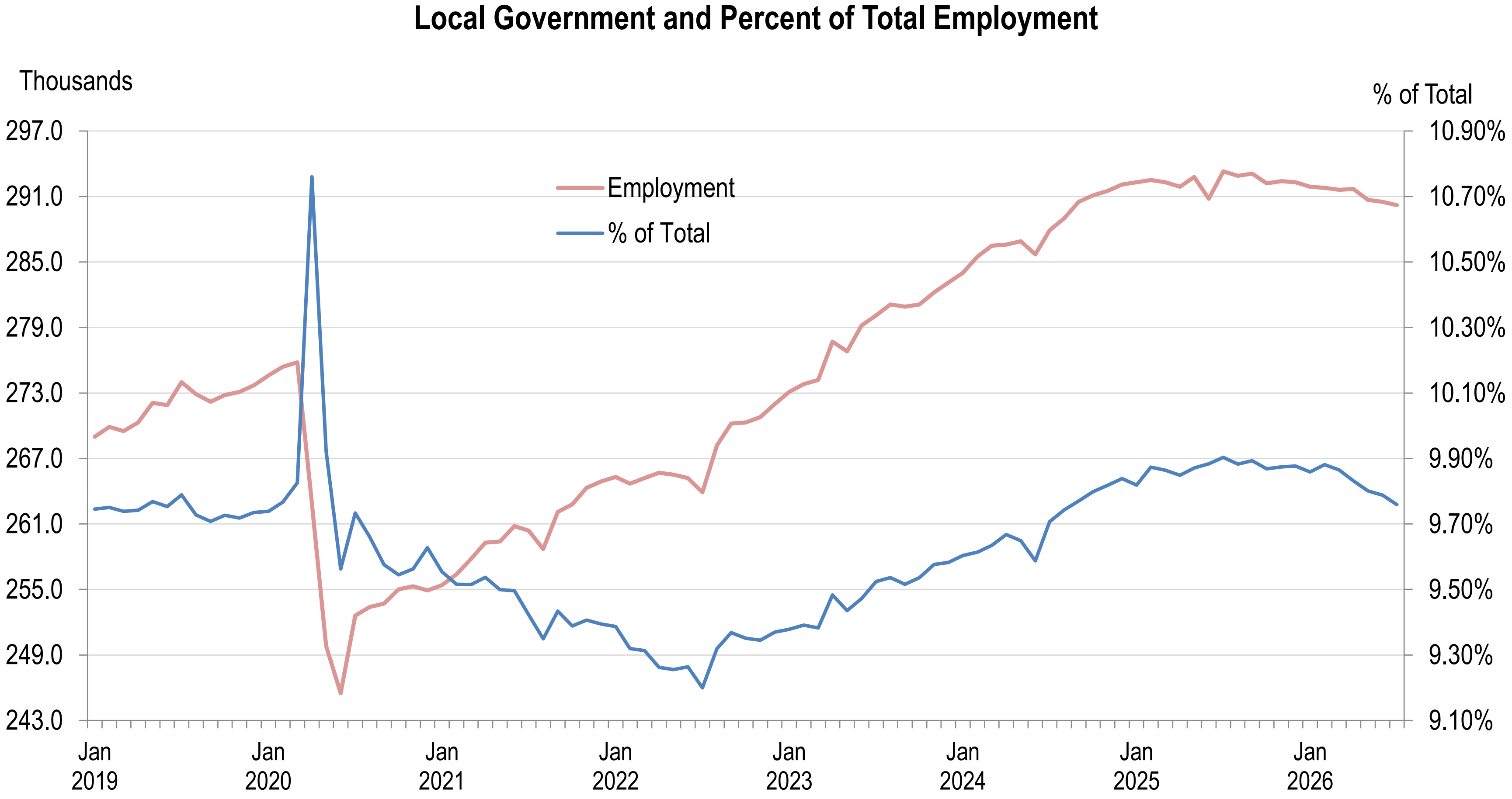
HSA Employment

Healthcare and social assistance employment increased from 301,800 in January 2019 to 364,500 in July 2026 (red). Aging boomers have created demand for health care.

In January 2019, sector employment was 10.93% of total employment (blue). It rose to 11.46% of total employment during the COVID-19 period. It dropped off and bottomed out at 10.70% in 2022. It has since increased to 12.26% in July 2026.

Colorado Local Government

Employment and Percent of Total Employment



Source: BLS, monthly SA, cber.co.

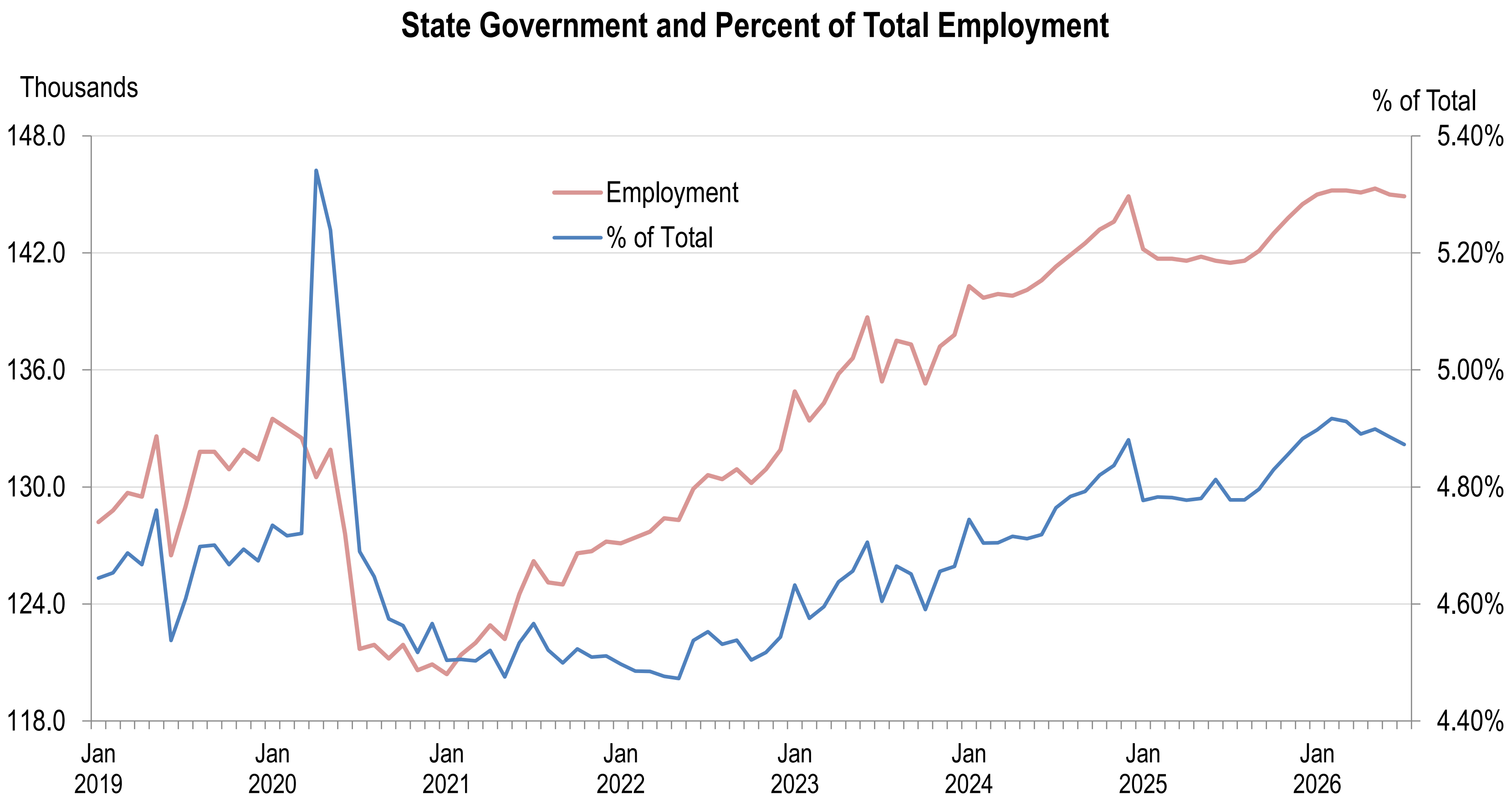
Local Government Employment

Employment increased from 269,000 in January 2019 to 290,200 in July 2026 (red). It peaked at 293,300 in July 2025. PK-12 education employment is challenged by slower population growth and "less than desired" funding.

In January 2019, sector employment was 9.75% of total employment (blue). It peaked at 10.76% in April 2020. It then bottomed out in July 2022 at 9.20%. It was 9.76% in July 2026.

Colorado State Government

Employment and Percent of Total Employment



Source: BLS, monthly SA, cber.co.

State Government Employment

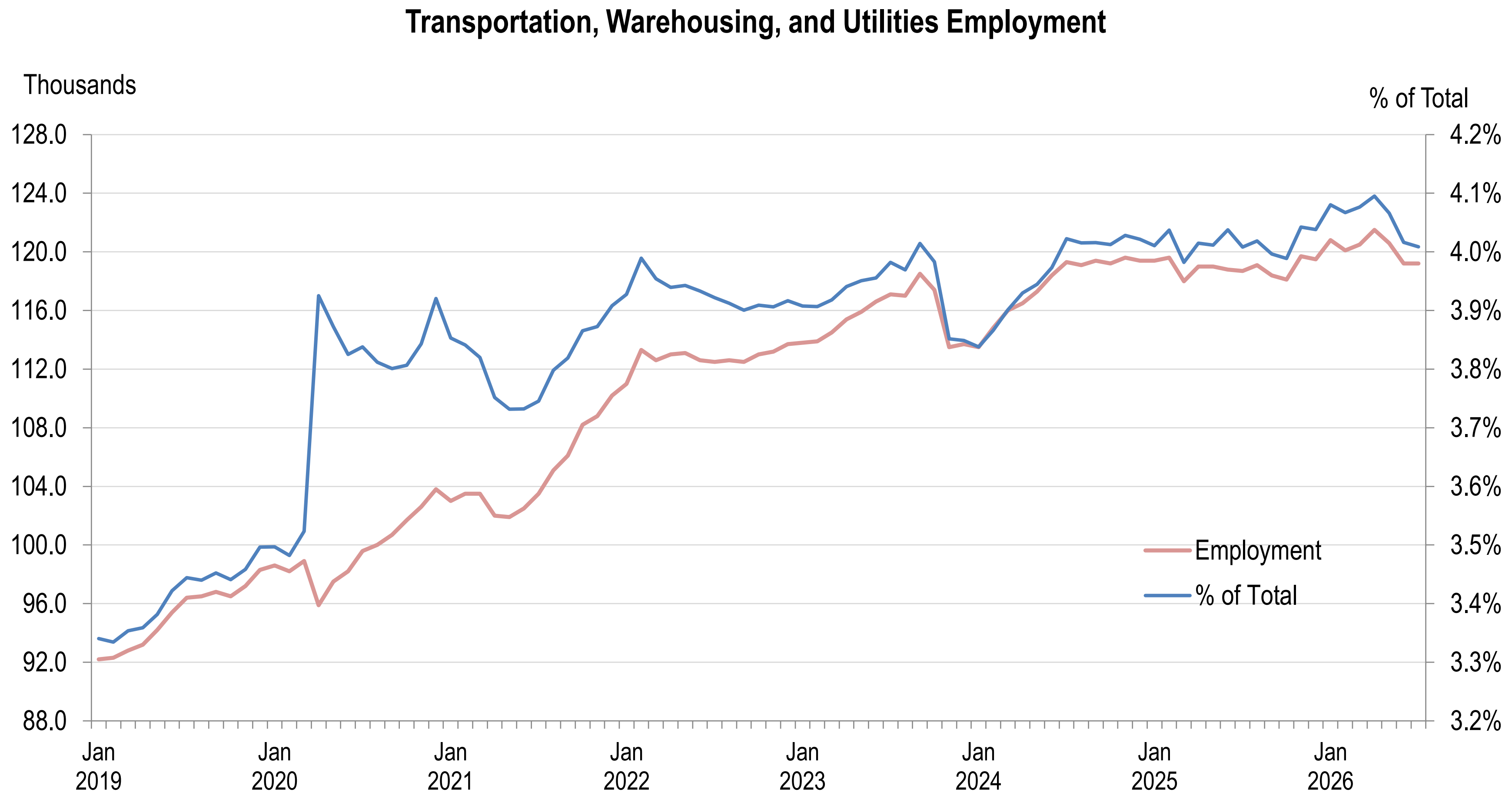
Employment increased from 128,200 in January 2019 to 144,900 in July 2026 (red).

This increase reflects gains in both state government and higher education.

In January 2019, sector employment was 4.64% of total employment (blue). It peaked at 5.34% in April 2020. It was 4.87% in July 2026.

Colorado Transportation, Warehousing, and Utilities

Employment and Percent of Total Employment



Source: BLS, monthly SA, cber.co.

TWU Employment

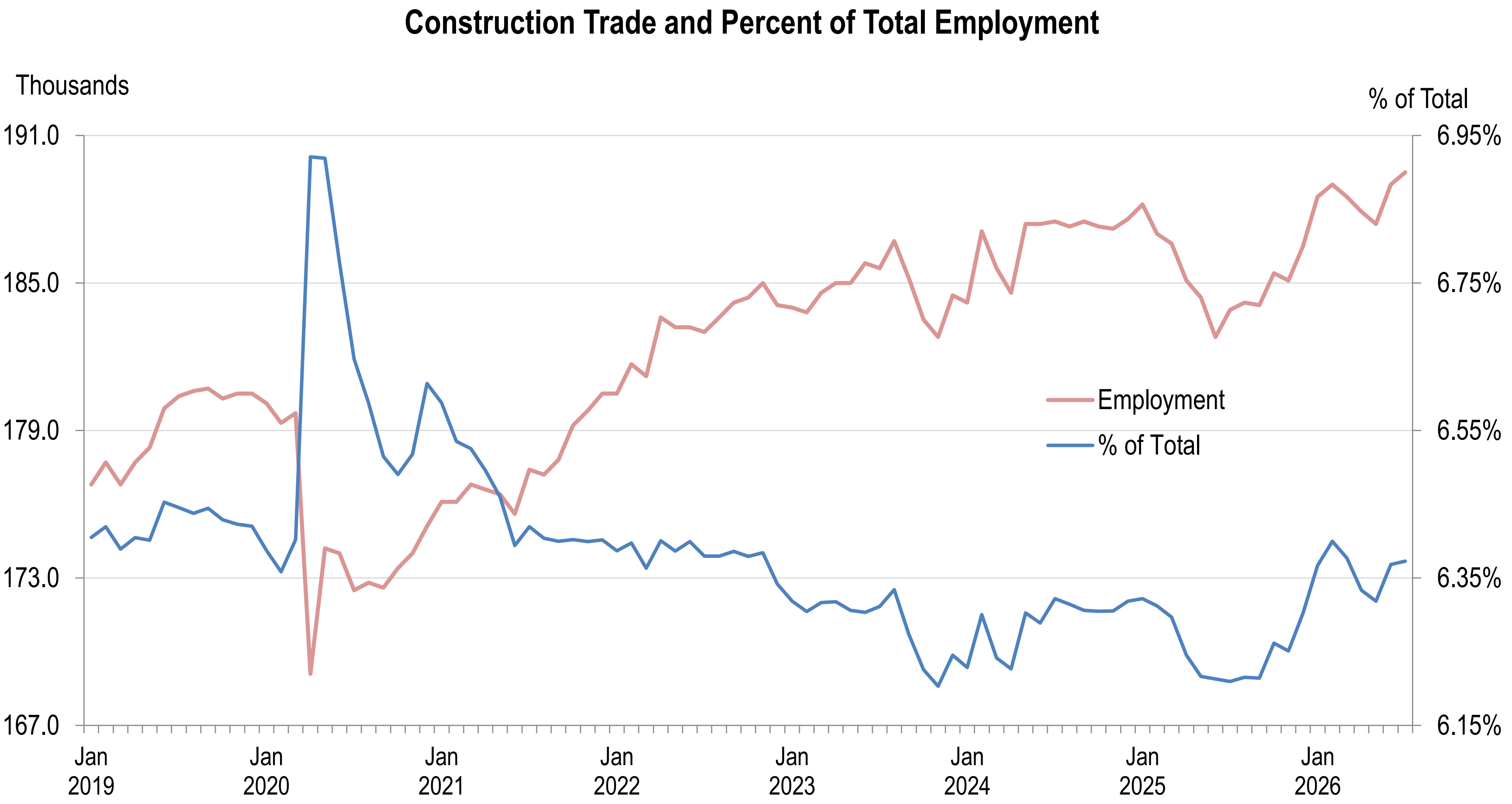
Employment increased from 92,200 in January 2019 to 119,200 in July 2026 (red).

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 4.01% in July 2026.

Colorado Construction

Employment and Percent of Total Employment



Source: BLS, monthly SA, cber.co.

Construction Employment

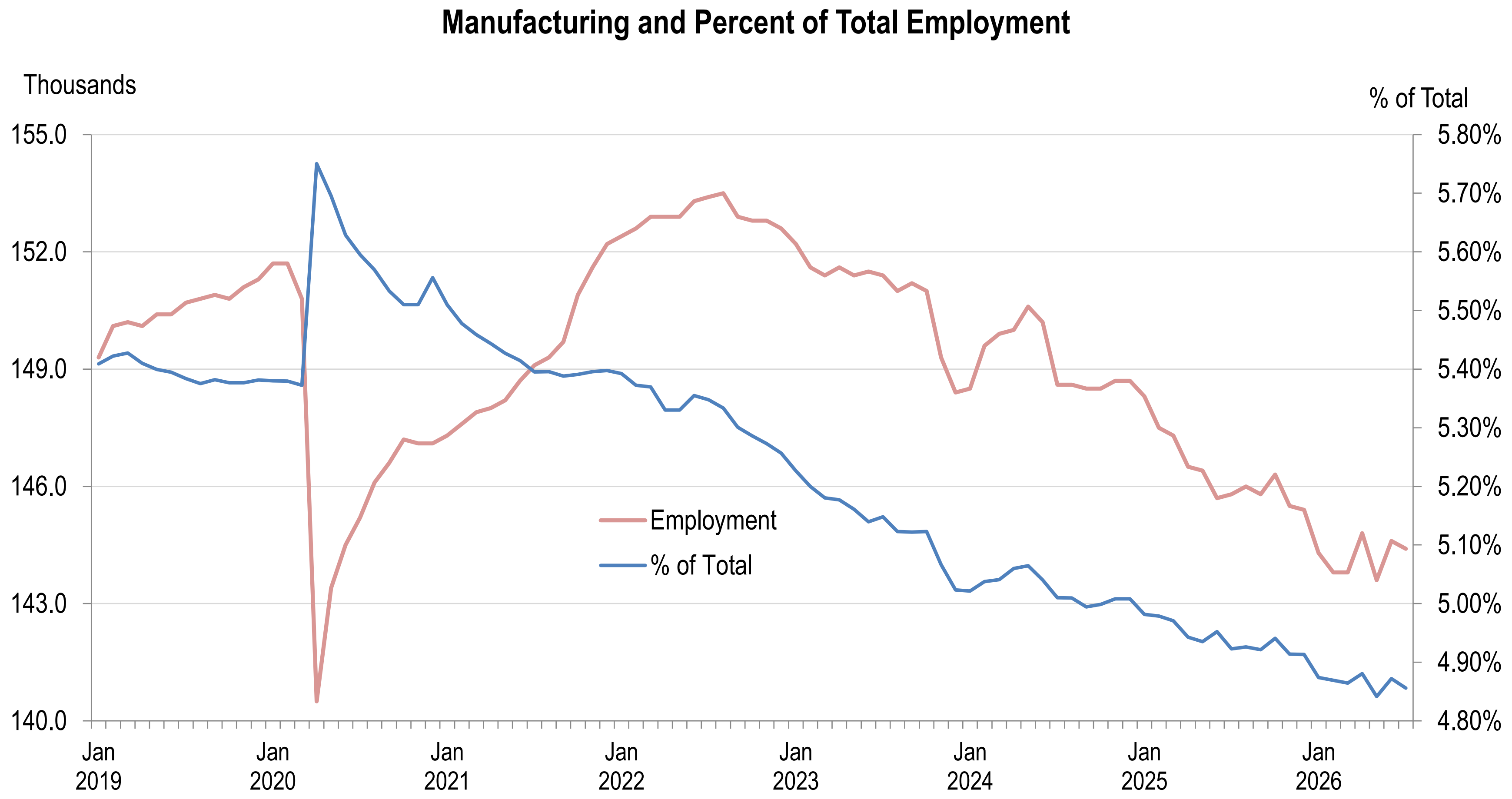
Employment increased from 176,800 in January 2019 to 189,500 in July 2026 (red).

Despite the increase in construction employment, Colorado continues to have a housing shortage. A sufficient number of permits are not being issued to address it.

In January 2019, sector employment was 6.41% of total employment (blue). It rose to 6.92% in April 2020. It was 6.37% in July 2026.

Colorado Manufacturing

Employment and Percent of Total Employment



Source: BLS, monthly SA, cber.co.

Manufacturing Employment

Employment decreased from 149,300 in January 2019 to 144,400 in July 2026 (red). It peaked at 153,500 in August 2022.

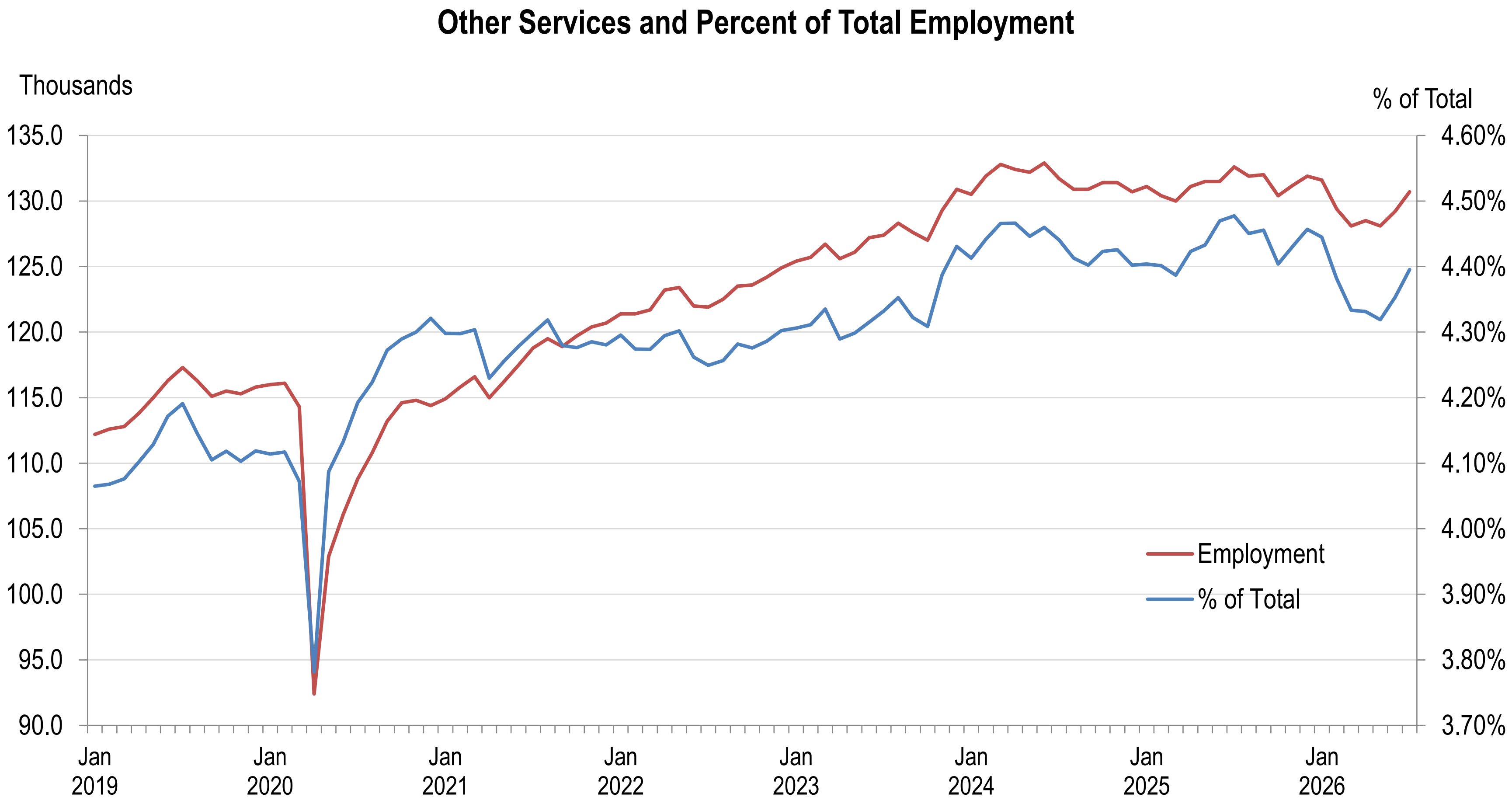
Some manufacturing companies are members of Colorado's high-tech clusters. There is extra cause for concern when manufacturing employment decreases.

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 July 2026.

Colorado Employment by Sectors with Low Average Wages

Colorado Other Services

Employment and Percent of Total Employment



Source: BLS, monthly SA, cber.co.

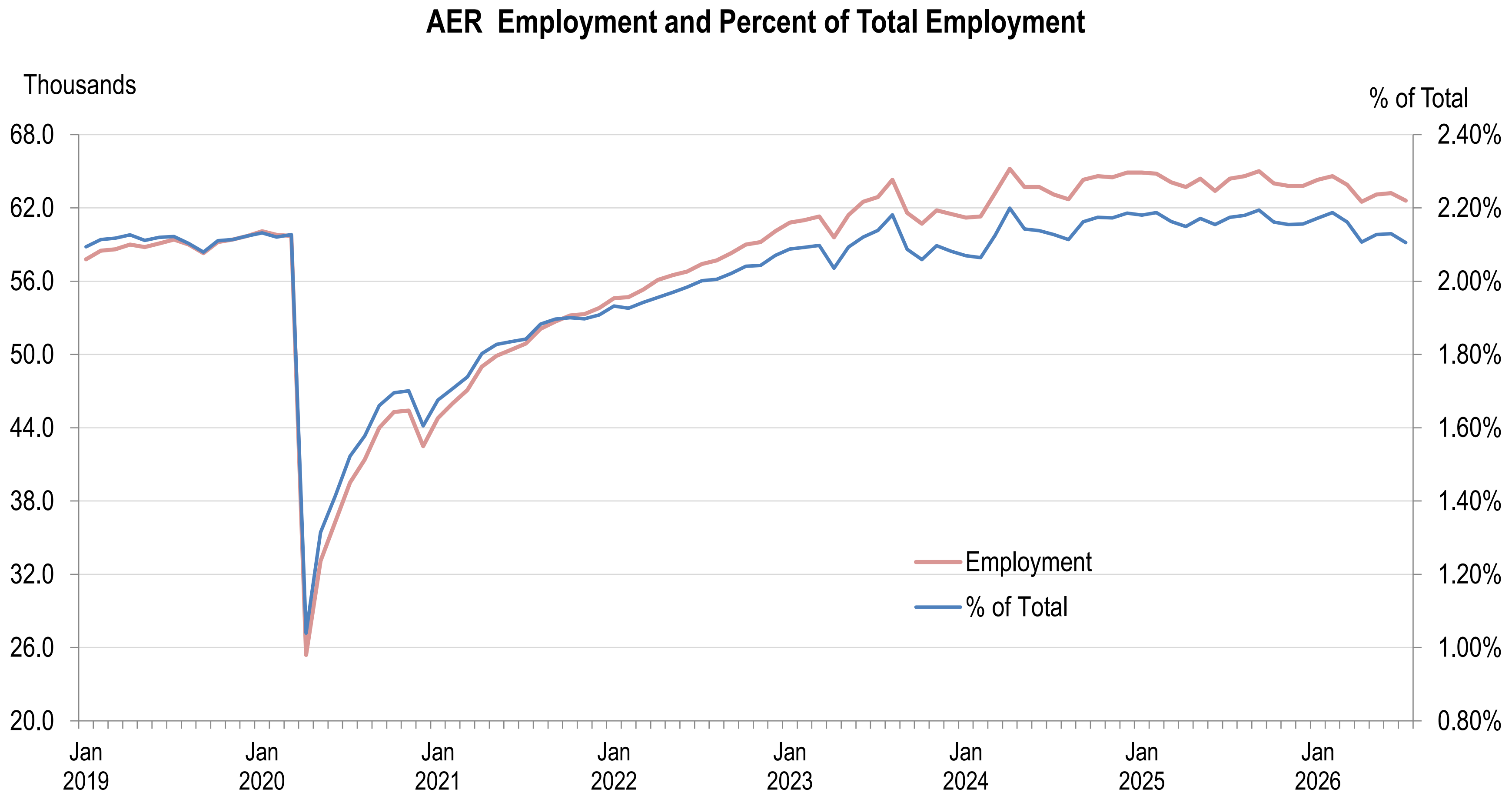
Other Services Employment

Employment increased from 112,200 in January 2019 to 130,700 in July 2026 (red). It peaked at 132,900 in June 2024.

Demand for other (personal) services has increased 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 4.40% in July 2026.

Colorado Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation (AER)
Employment and Percent of Total Employment



Source: BLS, monthly SA, cber.co.

AER Employment

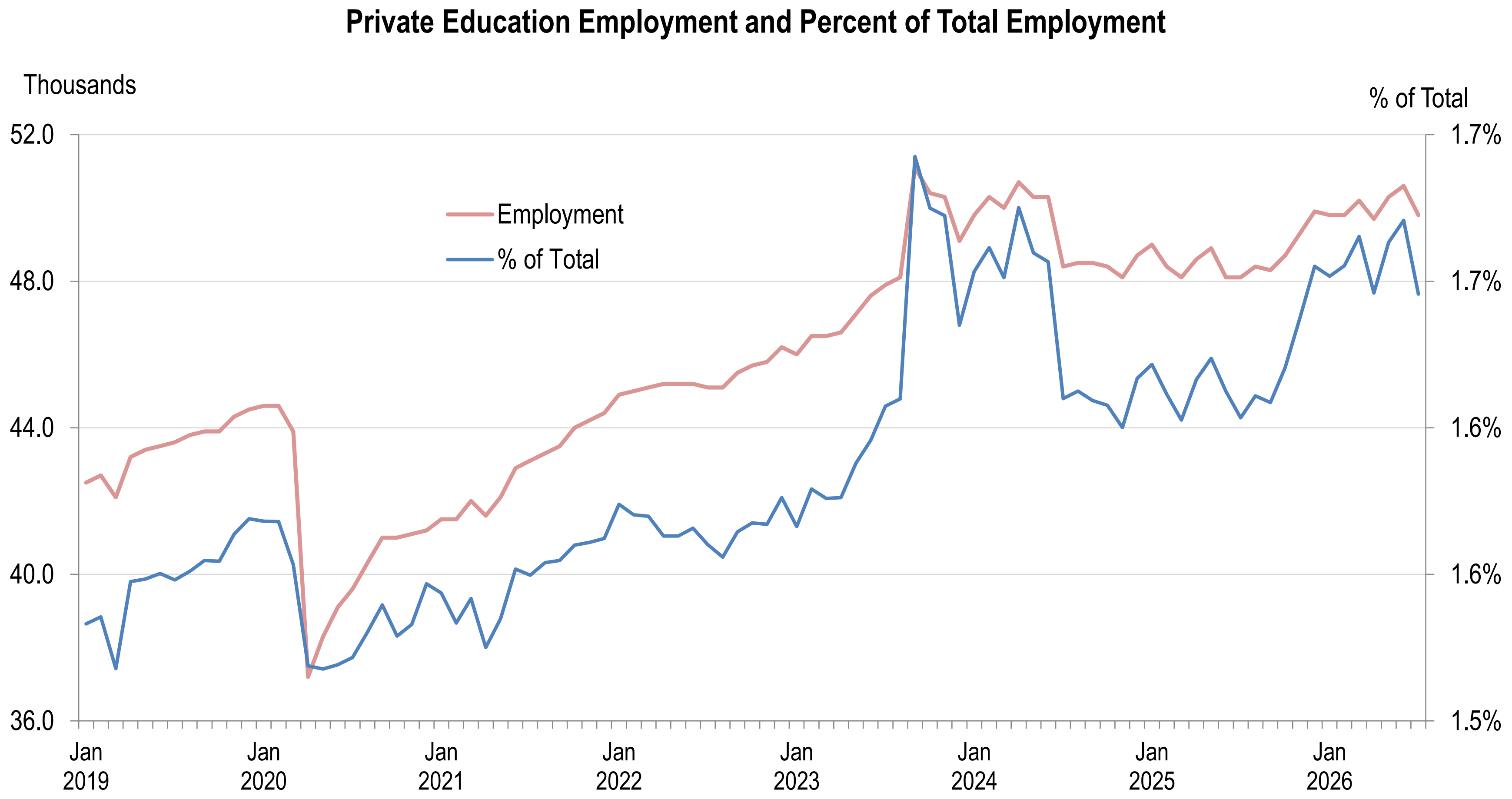
Employment increased from 57,800 in January 2019 to 62,600 in July 2026 (red).

In January 2019, sector employment was 2.09% of total employment (blue). It was 2.11% in July 2026.

AER and AFS comprise the Leisure and Hospitality Supersector. Before the COVID-19 recession, the L&H Supersector was a source of significant job creation. That has not been the case since 2019.

Colorado Private Education

Employment and Percent of Total Employment



Source: BLS, monthly SA, cber.co.

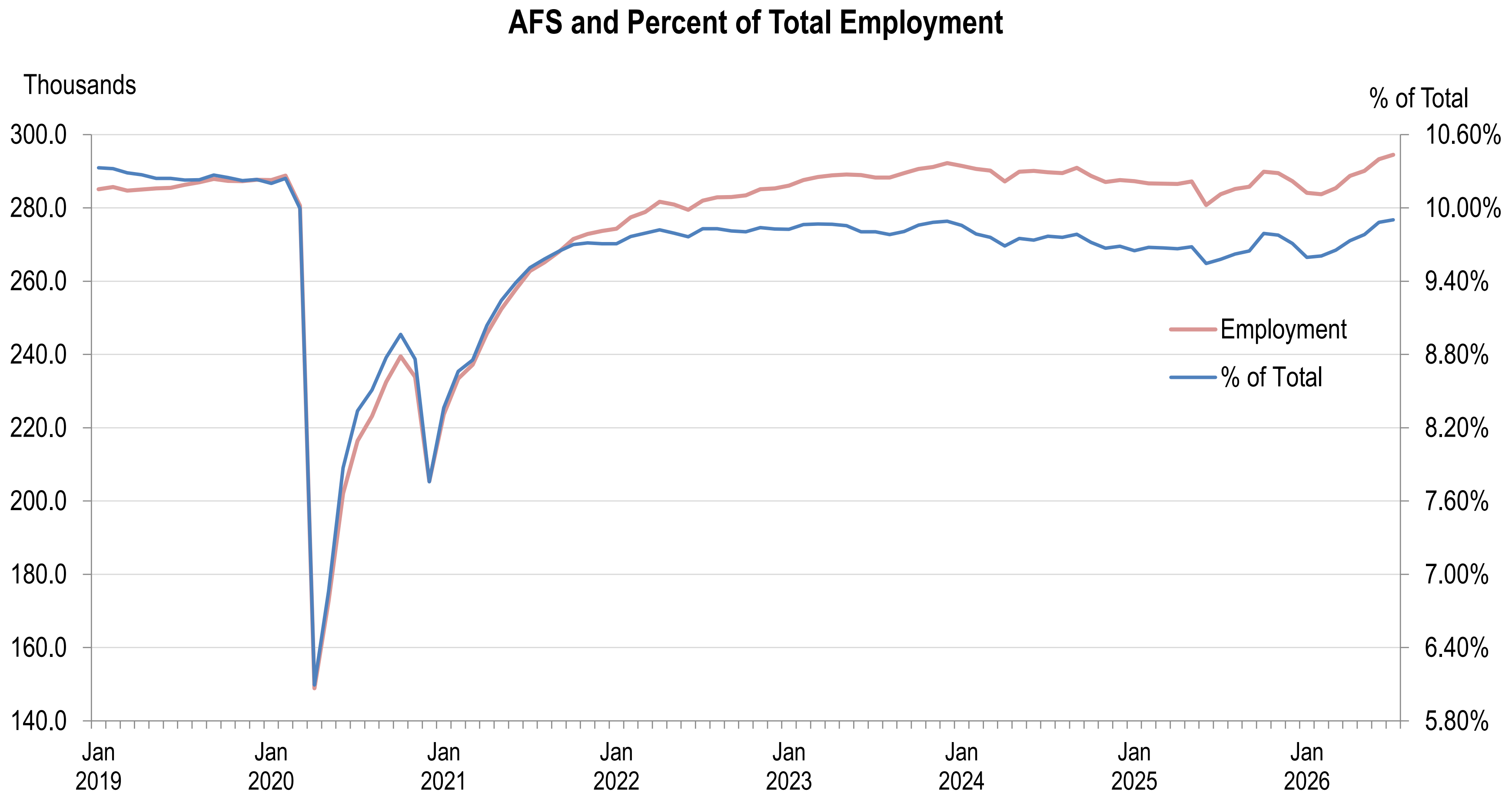
Private Education Employment

Employment increased from 42,500 in January 2019 to 49,800 in July 2026 (red). Employment peaked in September 2023 at 51,100.

In January 2019, sector employment was 1.54% of total employment (blue). It was 1.73% in September 2023 and 1.68% in July 2026.

Colorado Accommodation and Food Service

Employment and Percent of Total Employment



Source: BLS, monthly SA, cber.co.

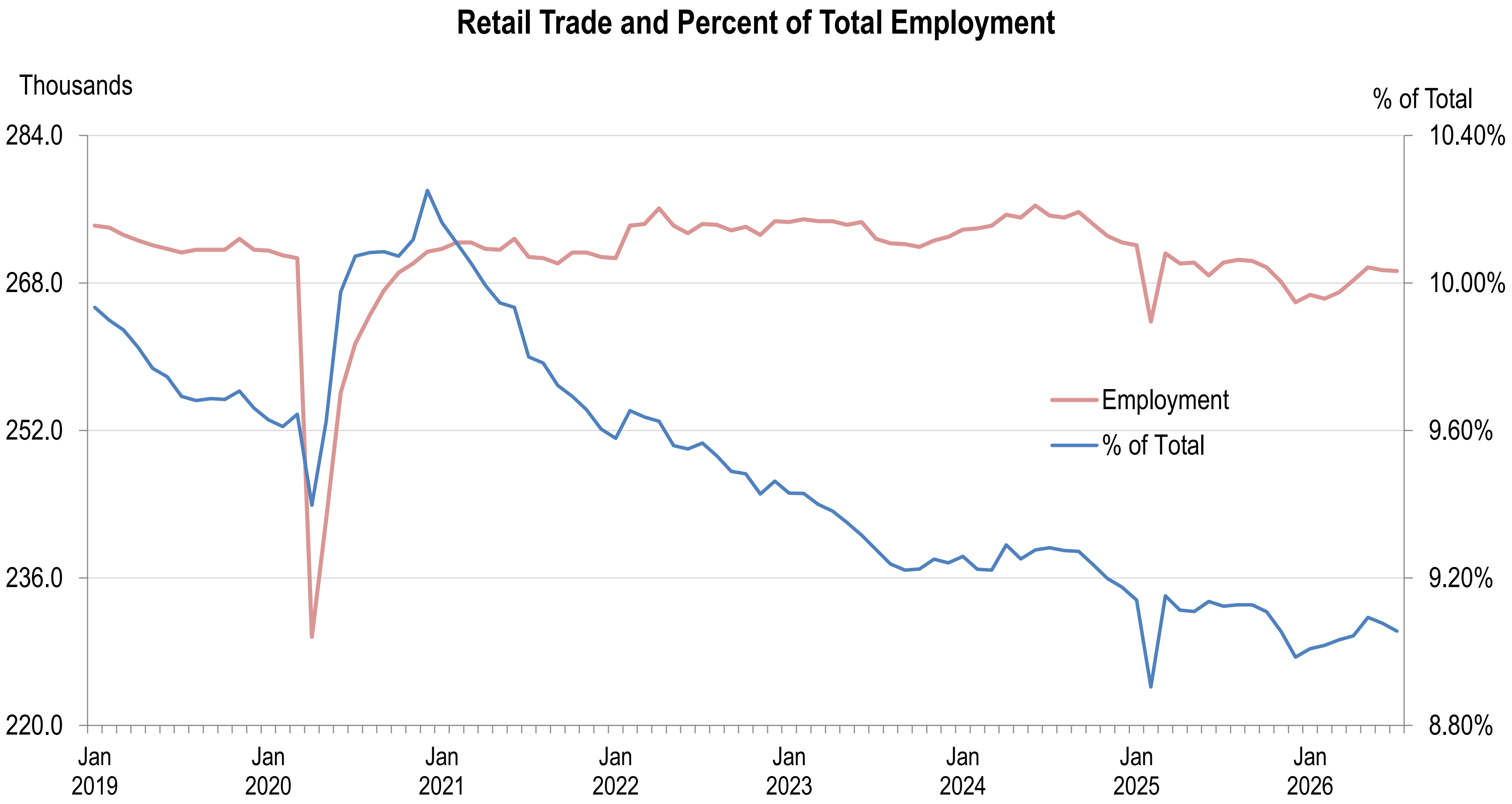
AFS Employment

Employment increased from 285,100 in January 2019 to 294,500 in July 2026 (red).

In January 2019, sector employment was 10.33% of total employment (blue). It declined during the COVID-19 recession and did not return to pre-COVID levels. It was 9.90% in July 2026.

Colorado Retail Trade

Employment and Percent of Total Employment



Source: BLS, monthly SA, cber.co.

Retail Employment

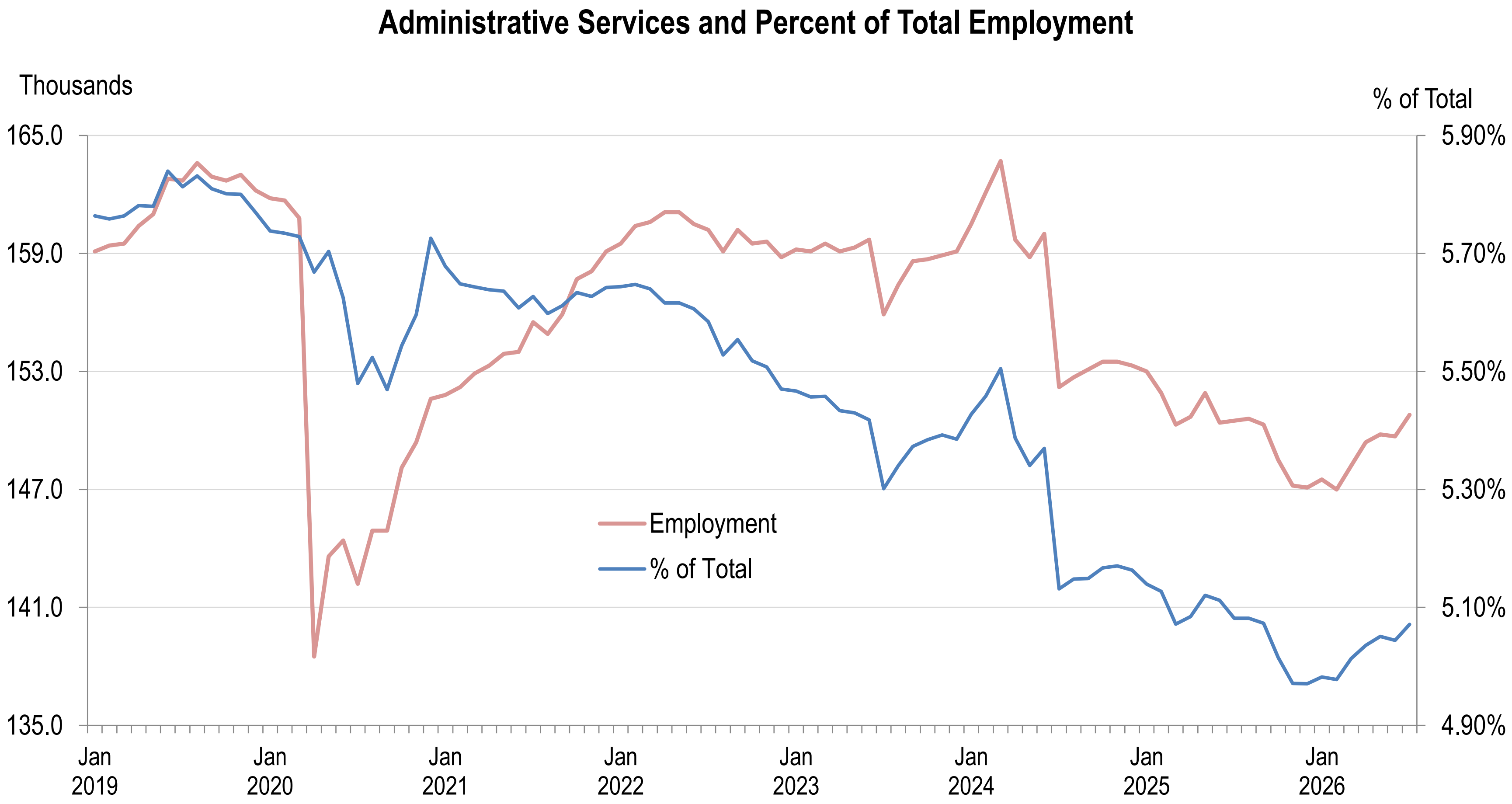
Employment decreased from 274,200 in January 2019 to 269,300 in July 2026 (red). The sector peaked at 276,400 in June 2024. It has declined since then.

Retail employment posted strong gains from 2010 to 2019. The sector has changed because e-commerce has increased and consumer habits have changed.

In January 2019, sector employment was 9.93% of total employment (blue). It was 9.06% in July 2026.

Colorado Administrative Services

Employment and Percent of Total Employment



Source: BLS, monthly SA, cber.co.

Administrative Services Employment

Employment decreased from 159,100 in January 2019 to 150,800 in July 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 5.07% in July 2026.

The decline is attributed to automation and corporate restructuring.

Summary and Forecast

Change in Colorado Employment

Colorado 1980 to 2026 Booms and Busts by Years and Decades

Colorado Booms

Colorado's strongest decade of growth, the tech boom, was during the 1990s. Between 2012 and 2019, average annual employment increased by 66,600. Between 2020 and 2026, the recovery from the COVID-19 recession looked like it might be a boom. Growth tapered off quickly in 2024 and 2025.

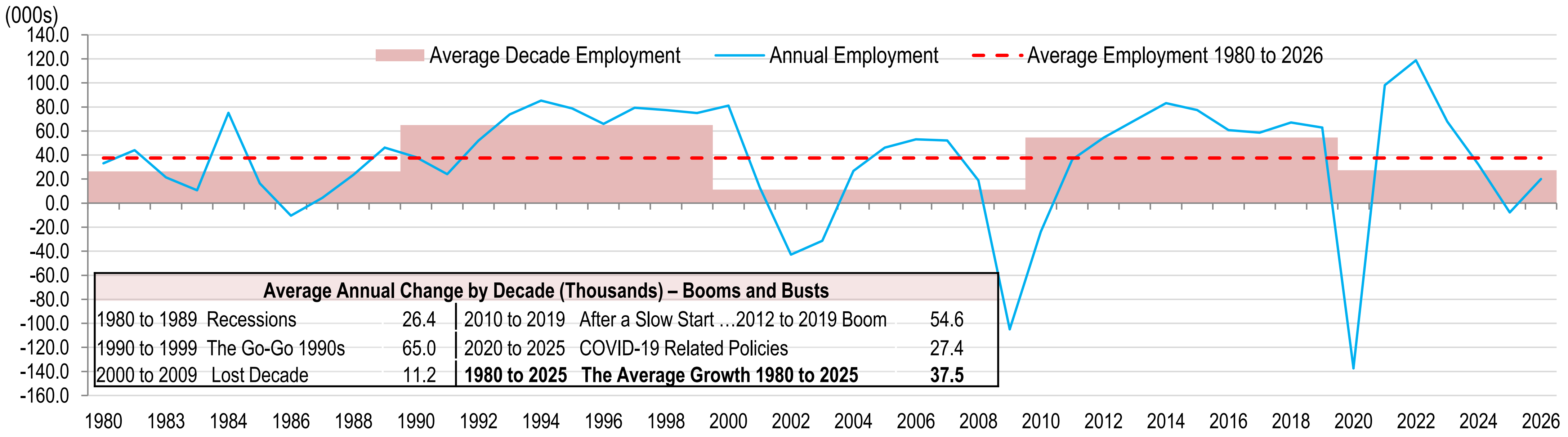
Colorado Busts

In the 1980s, there was an oil and gas bust and the Silverado Savings and Loan debacle.
The Lost Decade was between 2000 and 2009 – there were two recessions, natural disasters, and bad decisions during this period.
Between 2020 and 2026, there was the COVID-19 Recession.

Colorado Average

Between 1980 and 2026, the average annual employment was 37,500. Annual employment was below the average for 27 of 47 years. The annual employment was less than zero on seven occasions. Six of these times were between 2002 and 2026.

Change in Colorado Employment (Annual)



Average Annual Change by Decade (Thousands) – Booms and Busts

1980 to 1989	Recessions	26.4	2010 to 2019 After a Slow Start ...2012 to 2019 Boom	54.6
1990 to 1999	The Go-Go 1990s	65.0	2020 to 2025 COVID-19 Related Policies	27.4
2000 to 2009	Lost Decade	11.2	**1980 to 2025 The Average Growth 1980 to 2025**	**37.5**

Source: BLS, NSA, cber.co.

Colorado Economic Forecast 2026 Summary

Real GDP growth (Colorado) was lowered to account for uncertainty in the economy.

The population will increase by 35,200 people in 2026. About 16,000 will result from net migration.

Colorado employment is expected to increase by 20,100 in 2026 and remain weak through 2027. Colorado's unemployment rate will remain fairly stable.

Consumers will be resilient, but careful. Retail sales improved in 2025. Sales will be weaker in 2026.

The inflation rate has declined from the high point between 2021 and 2023. The accumulated effect of those high rates can still be felt. Colorado inflation is expected to be 2.7% in 2026.

Colorado Economic Forecast

	2023	**2024**	**2025**	**2026**
Real GDP Value (billions) (chained 2017)	$440.2	$448.8	$458.1	$467.2
% Change Real GDP	4.0%	2.0%	2.1	2.0%
Colorado Population	5,900.4	5,956.7	5,989.8	6,025.0
Annual Change (thousands)	50.3	56.3	33.2	35.2
CES Employment (thousands)	2,937.5	2,969.6	2,961.9	2.982.0
Annual Change (thousands)	67.8	32.1	-7.7	20.1
% Change	2.4%	1.1%	-0.3%	0.7%
Unemployment Rate	3.3%	4.1%	4.0%	4.0%
Retail Sales (billions)	$302.6	$306.5	$316.6	$326.1
% Change	0.9%	1.3%	3.2%	3.0%
Consumer Price Index (CPI)	320.3	327.6	335.1	344.1
% Change	5.2%	2.3%	2.3%	2.7%
DIA Passengers (millions)	77.8	82.3	82.3	85.0
Single Family (SF) Permits	19,641	20,534	17,406	17,500
Multi-family (MF) Permits	19,763	11,751	16,352	17,500
Oil Production (thousands) barrels	166,905	170,289	170,515	172,000

In 2024 and 2025, 82.3 million passengers flew through DIA. The number will increase in 2026. Passenger traffic at the Colorado Springs (COS) airport will be slightly lower than in 2025. The traffic at both airports was strong.

In 2025, a total of 33,758 permits were issued, of which 52% were SF permits. Colorado will continue to have demand for housing, particularly affordable housing. A total of 35,000 SF and MF permits will be issued in 2026.

Colorado’s crude oil production has increased each year since 2021. Fossil fuels will play an integral role in the state and country’s economies in the future.

The tone of the primary elections was contentious. The midterms will likely be worse, thus negatively impacting the economy in 2027 and beyond.

cber.co
Economic Outlook and Trends Through July (data), August 2026 Update.
Colorado and the United States

This analysis is for informational purposes only. Any opinions or interpretations of data are those of the presenter. As such, they do not represent the viewpoints of any group or particular organization.
For further information contact Colorado-based Business and Economic Research (cber.co).

For additional information contact cber.co at cber@cber.co, gary@garyhorvath.com, or garyhorvath@hotmail.com.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
A special thank you to Ana and Allyson Horvath for their review and comments on this publication.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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.