

El Paso County Economic & Workforce Progress Report (EPR)

Highlights - November & December 2025

The delayed Q3 GDP release last week showed an annualized [Real GDP Growth Rate {Page 4}](#) of 4.3% and a year-over-year rate of 2.3%. I've always paid more attention to the year-over-year rate because the annualized rate is taking one quarter and assuming an

annual growth rate based on that one quarter. Suffice it to say that 2025, in particular, has had outsized distortions. Either way you look at the data, "trend" growth is in the 2.0% range, so the Q3 data would normally excite me except the reasons for the quarterly growth are not in my mind structural and therefore difficult to sustain. They mostly represent three things that either reflect past distortions or current boosts that are not likely to hold. First, we had tariff-fearing upswings in imports, which resulted in a 0.6% GDP *contraction* in Q1. This has been followed by a rebound effect with lower imports (down 29.3% in Q2), which props up GDP. Second, AI investments in data centers and information-processing equipment are off the charts. In this segment I discuss

[most contractionary levels of GDP had it not been for AI investments](#). It's never good to have too many eggs in one basket. This [Harvard/Fortune](#) article echoes those analyses. Third, household expenditures continue to be decent, but savings rates are subpar (4.7% versus ~8% trend rate) and large swaths of middle/lower income consumers are using credit cards for necessities. After the holidays (which will likely increase credit card debt), robust consumption patterns will likely fade given that prices are not moderating and the labor market is softening. While the December [Consumer Sentiment Index {Page 4}](#) increased to 52.9 in December (from 51.0 in November), the index is still roughly 30 points below a year ago and roughly 50 points below the 2015-2020 range – and prices and job prospects are central to those sentiments substantiating the notion that consumerism may sputter in 2026.

Looking forward, the table shows you various forecasts for where 2025 may end up, as well as GDP forecasts for 2026 and 2027. What I read and what my gut tells me is that the distortions of 2025 (tariffs, government shutdowns, etc.) undoubtedly caused the wild gyrations in quarterly GDP, but those distortions will "level out and play out" more so in 2026 and 2027. I hope I am wrong, but the data picture I see is one where the incredible engine that is the U.S. economy will struggle to ride on its past momentum. Consumer spending has been resilient due to higher income household spending and wealth tied to past tailwinds (e.g., lower house prices, lower interest rates and a roaring stock market). None of those will disappear, but as home prices moderate and the (AI-driven) stock market levels out, those wealthier households could cut back modestly, and since the top 10% are fueling 50% of all expenditures, the U.S. economy would moderate as well.

I would normally look to younger cohorts forming families, buying homes and generally spending, but there are far fewer younger people, their debt loads are higher, and their job prospects are lower (e.g., the unemployment rate for 20-24 year-olds is astonishingly 8.3% according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics). The unemployment rate only measures those actively looking for work, so adult children living with relatives who are not looking for work don't count and neither do full-time college students. The higher entry-level worker unemployment rate is another structural issue that's multi-dimensional [including AI impacts, which I've talked/written extensively about](#), and outdated college majors/training to name just a couple.

My caution around U.S. growth also relates to persistent [Inflation {Page 4}](#), which moderated in November to 2.7%, but what consumers gripe most about is overall price levels which are roughly 30% higher than January 2020. Manufacturing and small business surveys show that producers are buckling under higher input costs and plan to increase prices (+30% already have and +30% plan to in the next three months) stating that they cannot continue to absorb their higher costs mostly due to tariffs, higher employee healthcare benefit payments, and higher insurance costs. Smaller employers appear to be particularly affected, with 64% also citing supply chain disruptions. This appears to also be true at a local level. I will be doing a presentation for the local Women's Chamber in January and asked them to informally survey their members about business conditions and comments included "ongoing difficulty finding qualified applicants, lower discretionary spending, need for more marketing to maintain sales, rising costs, etc."

"The capital expenditure outlook is bifurcated amid an AI investment boom. Business investment growth saw another large upward revision to 7.3% on even stronger spending on intellectual property (IP) products – up 15% annualized, which marked the strongest advance since the late-1990s IT boom. Software investment skyrocketed at an annualized rate of 198% in Q2.... In contrast, investment in structures declined by 7.5% annualized, marking its sixth consecutive quarterly drop." ~Ernst & Young (Lydia Bousour)

how analysts say the first half of 2025 would have had almost contractionary levels of GDP had it not been for AI investments. It's never good to have too many eggs in one basket. This [Harvard/Fortune](#) article echoes those analyses. Third, household expenditures continue to be decent, but savings rates are subpar (4.7% versus ~8% trend rate) and large swaths of middle/lower income consumers are using credit cards for necessities. After the holidays (which will likely increase credit card debt), robust consumption patterns will likely fade given that prices are not moderating and the labor market is softening. While the December [Consumer Sentiment Index {Page 4}](#) increased to 52.9 in December (from 51.0 in November), the index is still roughly 30 points below a year ago and roughly 50 points below the 2015-2020 range – and prices and job prospects are central to those sentiments substantiating the notion that consumerism may sputter in 2026.

Forecast Year for Real GDP	External Forecaster Range*	CO Office of State Planning & Budgeting	Tatiana's
2025	1.8% – 2.0%	1.9%	1.8%
2026	1.5% - 2.3%	1.2%	1.6%
2027	2.1 – 2.3%	1.4%	1.5%

*Includes Moody's, Wells Fargo, Conference Board, Philadelphia Federal Reserve

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I believe higher producer prices have shown up not only in the prices we pay, but in employer's reluctance to hire new workers and make new capital investments. Remember – most of the new investment in the U.S. in 2025 has been tied to AI. Even manufacturing, with the emphasis on reshoring, has seen a decline in employment (-73,000 jobs) from November 2024 to November 2025 according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Employers in any industry hire when profit margins and future prospects look good and don't hire in the antithetical situation.

Interest Rates {Page 4} were cut by 0.25% earlier this month and two cuts are tentatively penciled in for 2026. Hopefully, we will not have a government shutdown in late January (with the concomitant data delays), and hopefully, we can reverse the decades-in-the-making erosion of our economic reporting agencies. Solid data is always important, but we must have full access to and confidence in key indicators like inflation and employment as those two dictate the trajectory of interest rate decision making. Interest rate manipulations are a blunt (monetary policy) tool, but we wouldn't want to move in the wrong direction with too few or too many cuts as that would exacerbate an already tenuous economic situation for households and businesses.

Another reason for my forecasting pessimism is the increased costs to lower/middle-income households due to the expiration of the Affordable Care Act premium tax credits. Whether we agree or disagree with ACA, Reuters cites a per enrollee rise in cost of health care of between \$900 and \$1,900 per year (e.g., for a family of four estimates are almost +\$15,000 per year). Approximately 24 million individuals would be directly affected and between 4-5 million are expected to become uninsured (which insured individuals pay for anyway through increased cost shifting). Honestly, I get frustrated when I hear about how broken Medicare/Medicaid and ACA are as I hear just as much if not more about atrocious private health insurance rejections, increasing deductibles, and premiums. It's a part-time job dealing with public and private health insurance alike. The vast majority of Americans feel it's the entire healthcare system that's dysfunctional and I wrote an editorial "Tragedy of the Commoners" about how crippling healthcare is for the U.S. economy with all the relevant health spending stats as well as commentary about the unfortunate United Healthcare CEO homicide. My kids said, "That article was a doozy, mom!"

U.S. Job Openings {Page 4} remained steady through October consistent with the notion that demographics is destiny. While we may have some cooling of the labor market with Unemployment Rates {Page 4} that are inching up, the steady job openings reinforce the notion that we simply do not have enough working-age people, and as such, businesses struggle to find and keep qualified workers. We also now have 1.2 million fewer immigrant workers. Having said that, I am closely watching the labor market. The quits rate has been quite low and layoffs have been inching up. Workers realize a new job is not easy to find, so they are staying put, and some businesses are struggling with input costs and are discharging workers (in addition to holding off on hiring). All in, I would characterize the U.S. labor market as steady but not infallible in 2026.

New El Paso County Jobs {Page 5} data for 2025 Q2 was just released, and once again, our local job situation isn't looking nearly as rosy as the first ten years since I moved here (in 2014). The graph painfully shows that local job growth in 2024 dropped off significantly to only +2,019 new jobs, which is less than half of what we need to match population growth. Unfortunately, 2024 Q1 to 2025 Q1 only saw 1,290 new jobs and the recent data for 2024 Q2 to 2025 Q2 saw a *drop* in the number of local jobs (-733). I have not seen this in the eleven years I've lived here. If you were at my annual economic update at Garden of the Gods, you heard from the state's budget director that our state is experiencing a similar scenario. Various state economists said job growth this year in Colorado, through September, has been roughly a third of what it was before the pandemic - about 0.6%, compared to 2.2%.

At a state and local level, there are some fascinating forecast changes from The State Demography Office showing a meaningful shift in Population {Page 6}. The demographics undoubtedly play into the subpar jobs conundrum. When I moved here 11 years ago, the state was projected to surpass 8 million residents by 2050, and El Paso County was projected to reach 1 million residents. The SDO has been revising population growth downwards for a few years now and the November release now shows about 800,000 fewer residents in 2050 in Colorado (7.2 million) and roughly 40,000 fewer residents in El Paso County (965,622). Note that the updated tables in the EPR go through 2060 now. Like the rest of the U.S., there are notable downward revisions among children (ages 0-17) and, to a lesser extent, adults 65 and older as the "Boomer" effect dwindles. The absolute number of people determines the number of workers (and consumerism/business growth), the demand for housing, the demand for K-12 and higher education, Social Security and Medicare expenditures (~40% of the federal budget) relative to new worker tax revenues, and therefore everything related to

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our national and local economies. This is much of the reason at my presentations I am increasingly stating that our economic model and system as a whole will need to pivot to a large extent to one based less on “new bodies” and their demand while relying more on other ways to grow the economy. These include productivity gains per worker (AI/robotics), higher labor participation and larger tax base, which I believe we can obtain via subsidized higher education/training for those who can’t afford it, higher innovation levels from all groups, a later (Social Security) retirement age, responsible immigration, and policies that make it easier for parents to work and buy homes (which I personally think would raise fertility rates more than any other lever).

In the housing market, [Home Sales {Page 7}](#) declined to 837 in November, which is seasonally expected, and [Home Prices {Page 7}](#) remain relatively steady. In Q3, the Colorado Springs median existing single-family price reached \$474,100, essentially unchanged from last year (+0.2%) maintaining its position as the 49th most expensive metropolitan area nationally. Denver remained the 22nd most expensive at \$651,900, which was 0.4% *below* its 2024 level. Boise continued to see stronger appreciation, with a 3.7% annual increase to \$509,800 and a ranking rise from 40th to 39th. Nationally, home prices rose 1.7% to \$426,800. With our prices staying flat and the U.S. continuing to increase somewhat, we are now “only” 11% higher in median home price relative to the U.S. That is a lot of the reason our local cost of living index (addressed below) has moderated so much. This is a good thing.

[Single-family Permits {Page 7}](#) increased to 232 in October from 181 in September but slipped to 166 in November. [Multi-family Permits {Page 7}](#) were minimal in September (28 units) and October (24 units), followed by a dramatic surge to 1,206 units in November, hinting at one or two large projects and likely some delayed approvals.

[U.S. New Vehicle Sales {Page 8}](#) were down 6.1% from November 2024 to November 2025. This slowdown has been expected as the market has faced headwinds from tariffs driving up prices as well as fewer subsidies for electric vehicles. Cox Automotive released a forecast for 2026 showing 16 million fewer auto sales (down 2.4%). Locally, new registrations in El Paso County fell 7.3% in September compared to a year earlier, yet luxury utility vehicle registrations rose 17.4%, suggesting higher-income households remain comparatively resilient and validating the notion of a [“K-shaped economy.”](#)

To wrap up, lately I’ve been thinking a lot about my first several years in Colorado and how I felt like the ebullient, optimistic economist when I presented and when I wrote. Now feel I am always giving bad news, and I don’t like it. When I try to step back and “smooth out the outliers,” I still land in a foggy, somewhat perilous place mostly because I have concerns about the long term. We need more workers (and immigration reform), the outlook for future workers isn’t good with a 1.6 fertility rate, our deficit is only growing with \$1 trillion a year in interest alone, which crowds out the investments we need, higher education (universities) aren’t adapting quickly enough, you know what I think about the healthcare system, and I see persistent inflationary pressures for a host of reasons. Colorado is still one of the best states in the nation for a plethora of great reasons, but we are not growing like we used to. Once again, fiscal pressures mount, and they are structural – we cannot just blame who is in office or the current business cycle – all politicians face the same harsh demographic and other realities. But wait! I do have some glimmers of hope. There are some aspects of the federal tax reforms enacted in 2025 that help middle and lower-income households. More aggressive interest rate cuts in 2026/27 could stimulate some much-needed (not just AI) investment, and home prices should continue to moderate. Locally, the cost of living in Colorado Springs was 101.1% of the U.S. average in the third quarter, down slightly from 101.5% in the prior quarter, and much lower than the ~108 range we had during the pandemic – mostly due to moderating home prices. Perhaps we can once again be attractive to new individuals and families who wish to join our awesome city and state. On that note, I wish you and yours a truly wonderful 2026 full of joy, prosperity, and time well spent with loved ones.

Tatiana & Rebecca

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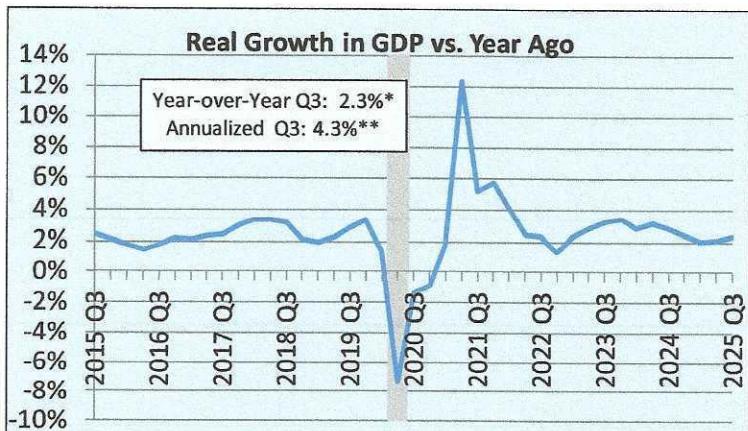
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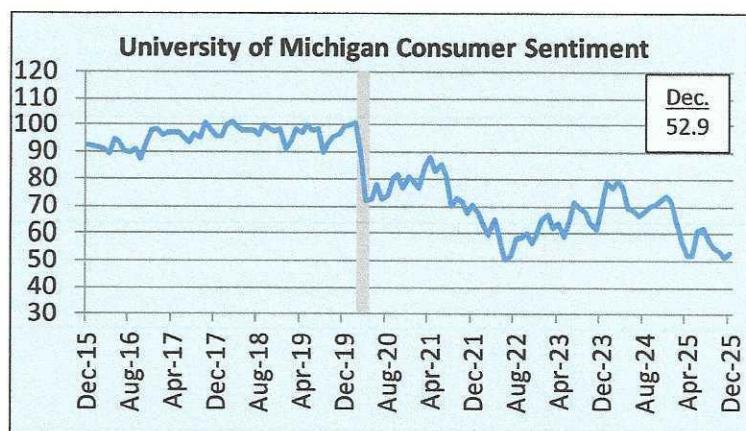
MACROECONOMIC "BIG PICTURE" (PAGE 4)



*Estimate of real GDP percent change from same quarter a year ago, SA

**If quarterly changes were annualized over the year.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis

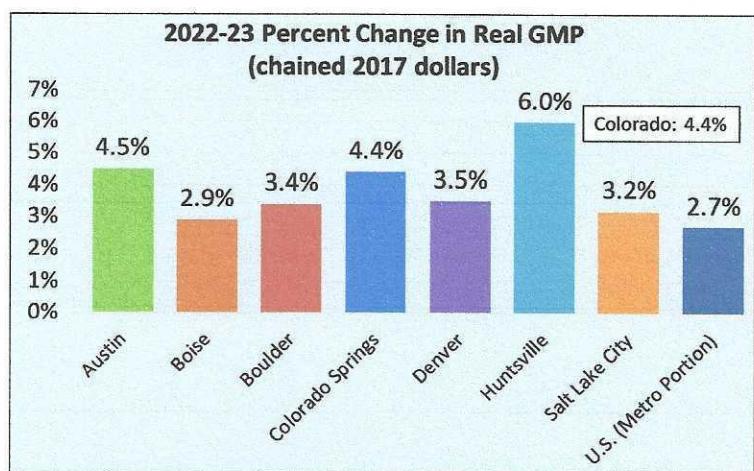


Source: University of Michigan

Forecasts for U.S. Real GDP and Unemployment (SA)			
	2024 Actual	2025 Forecast	2026 Forecast
Real GDP Growth	2.8%	1.8%	1.6%
Unemployment Rate	4.0%	4.3%	4.6%

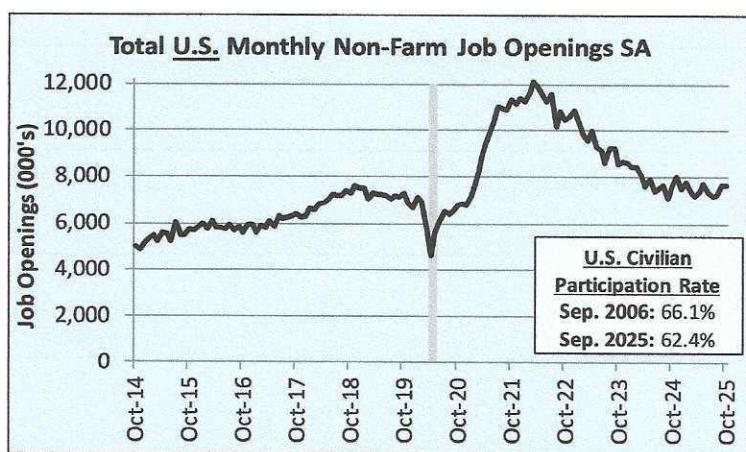
Forecasts by Data-Driven Economic Strategies with input from the Conference Board, Wells Fargo, Colorado Department of Labor & Employment, and other anecdotal resources.

Sources: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics



Note: Data includes military. Real GMP is adjusted for regional price parity (RPP). This regional data lags ~23 months.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis

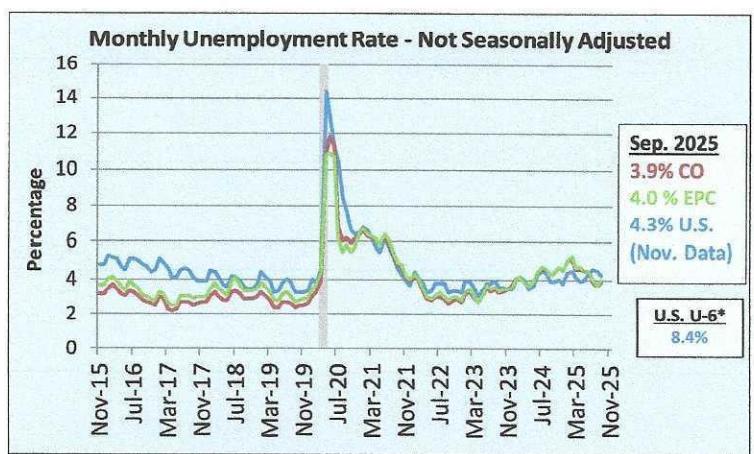


Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics; Job openings data lags.

	All items	Less food & energy
Change from October to November 2025 (SA)	N/A	N/A
Last 12-months (NSA)	2.7%	2.6%

The 2025 Q3 cost of living in the Colorado Springs MSA was 101.1% of the U.S. according to C2ER data provided by the CS Chamber & EDC.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics; all urban consumers (CPI-U)



Note: Data in the graph is NSA to enable comparisons with counties.

*U-6 includes unemployed, those marginally attached to the labor force, plus those employed part time who would prefer full-time work.

Sources: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics; CO Dept. of Labor & Employment



Source: Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System

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LOCAL LABOR MARKET (PAGE 5)

Top Job Openings, Colorado Springs MSA

November 2025

Top Job Titles	# of Job Postings	Median Advertised Salary
Registered Nurses	679	\$93,440
Retail Salespersons	450	\$35,456
Software Developers	291	\$136,704
Computer Sys Engineers/Architects	239	\$143,872
Customer Service Reps	238	\$43,648
Heavy & Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	235	\$58,752
1st-Line Supervisors, Retail Sales	233	\$48,000
Food Services Managers	212	\$54,784
Medical & Health Services Managers	187	\$83,712
Sales Reps, Wholesale & Mfg	160	\$80,256

Colorado Springs MSA, September 2025

TOTAL Job Openings: 16,708

TOTAL Unemployed: 15,788

Workers Available per Job Opening: 0.94

Sources: The Conference Board®-Lightcast® Help Wanted OnLine® via Pikes Peak Workforce Center; CO Dept. of Labor & Employment

2024 Federal Poverty Level (FPL)		
	El Paso County	U.S.
% people at FPL or below	8.5%	12.1%
Note: FPL in 2024 was \$15,060 for an individual and \$31,200 for a family of four.		

2025 Q2 Average Annual Wages for All Industries		
El Paso County wages are 8.3% lower than U.S. wages and 14.4% lower than CO wages.		
U.S.	Colorado	El Paso County
\$74,672	\$80,028	\$68,484
2025 Q2 El Paso County Total Employment*		309,303
*Estimated military employment in 2024 (and % of total 2024 EPC who are military).		59,183 (16.1%)

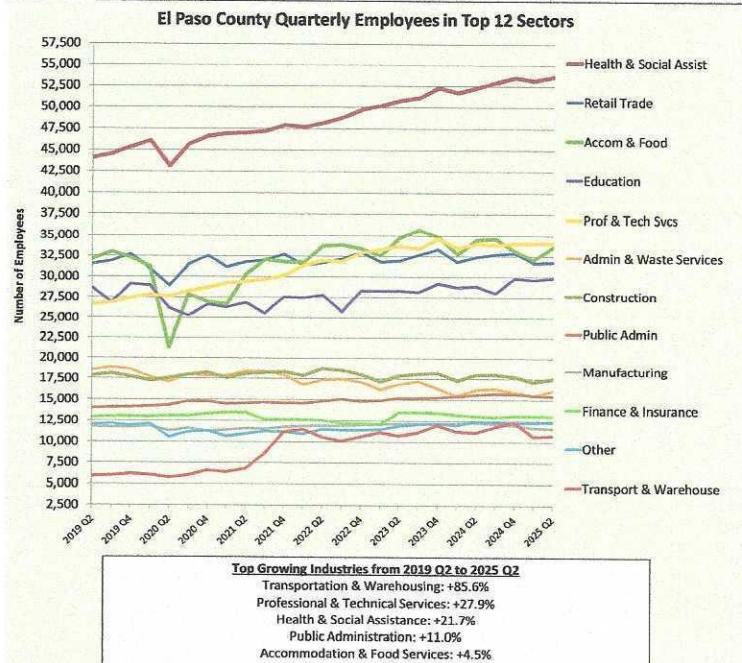
2024-25 Minimum Wage & Living Wage El Paso County

	Wage/Hr	Annualized
Minimum wage salary for full-time worker	\$14.81	\$30,805
Living wage: HHs with 1 adult, 2 children	\$58.48	\$121,638
Living wage: HHs with 2 adults (1 working), 2 children	\$44.31	\$92,165
Living wage: HHs with 2 adults* (2 working), 2 children	\$31.61	\$65,749

*Living wage is for each working adult. For specifics, go to livingwage.mit.edu.

*QCEW data does not include military-related employees.

Sources: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and Colorado Department of Labor and Employment, QCEW; Local military installations; U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 1-year estimates; U.S. Department of Health & Human Services; MIT Living Wage Calculator



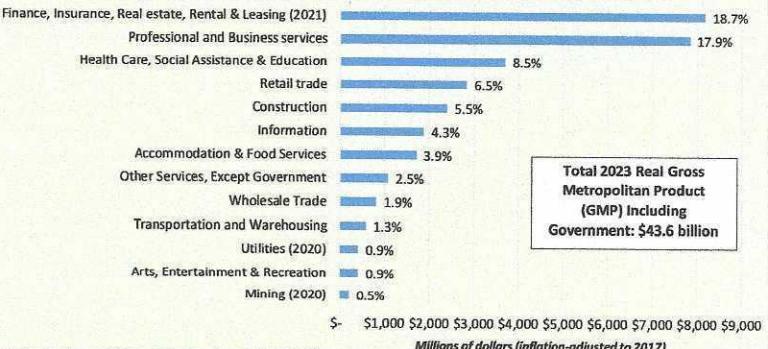
El Paso County Annual Job Changes



An estimated 5,600 new jobs are needed based upon population growth and age composition. This QCEW data lags up to three quarters and includes public and private employment, but not military-related employees.

Source: Colorado Dept. of Labor & Employment, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW)

Real GMP Contribution by Private Sectors, Colorado Springs MSA, 2023



Manufacturing data last disclosed in 2012 when it was 7.1% of real GMP. Government data is no longer released by sector for 2016 when federal military was 12.7%, state & local government was 8.2% and federal civilian government was 5.3% of real GMP. Utilities and Mining data last disclosed in 2020. Finance, insurance, real estate & leasing was last disclosed in 2021. GMP (local) data lags by approximately 23 months. GMP is the same as GDP for the nation but at the local level.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis

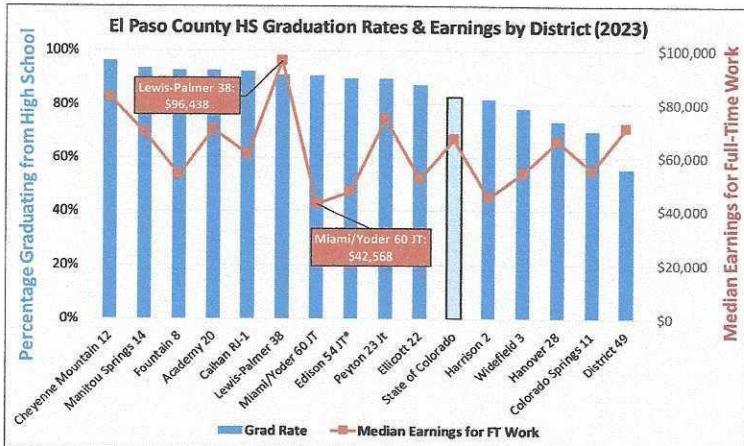
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DEMOCRAPHICS (PAGE 6)

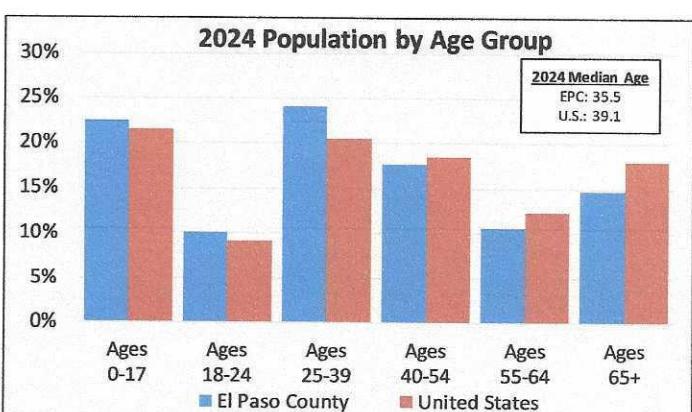
Population Estimates		
	2024	2060
El Paso County	752,892	1,023,604
Colorado	5,956,729	7,544,962

The City of Colorado Springs had a population of 494,808 in 2024.
Source: Colorado State Demography Office

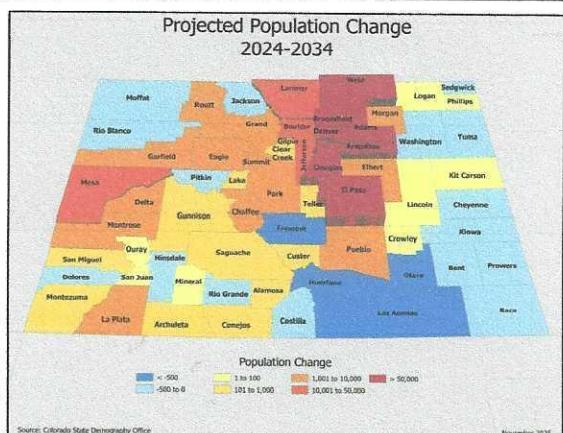
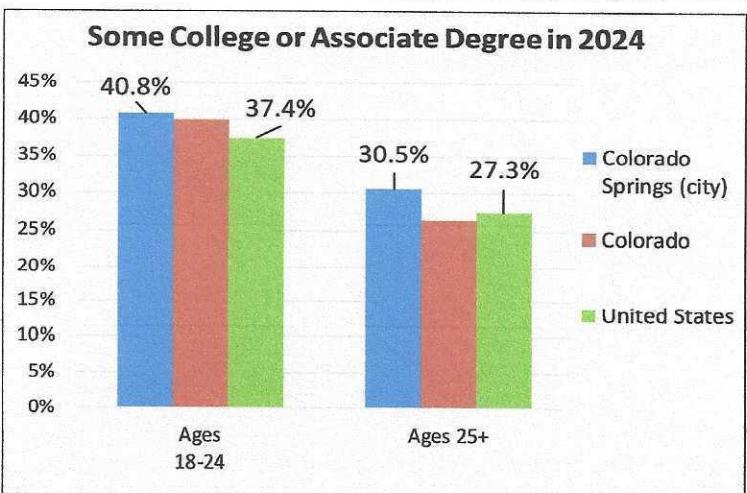
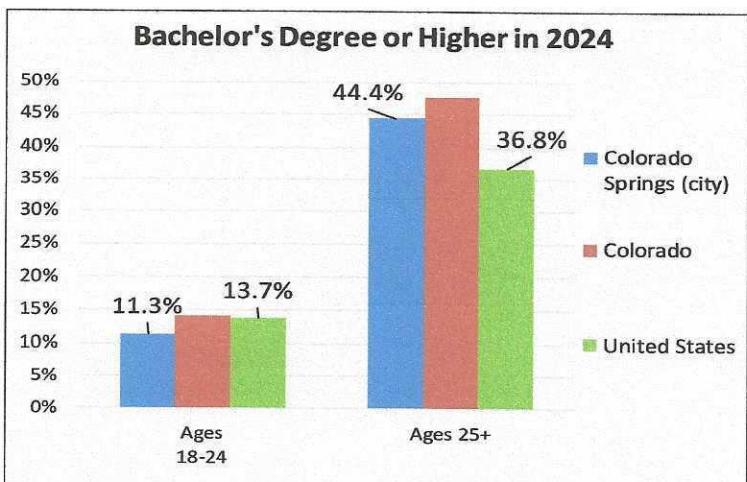
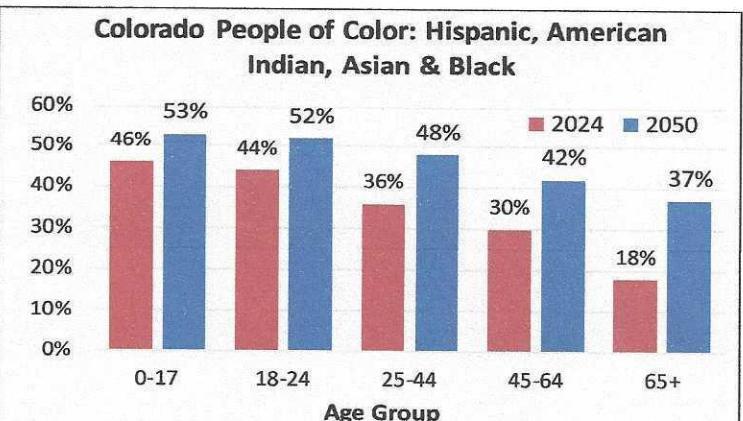
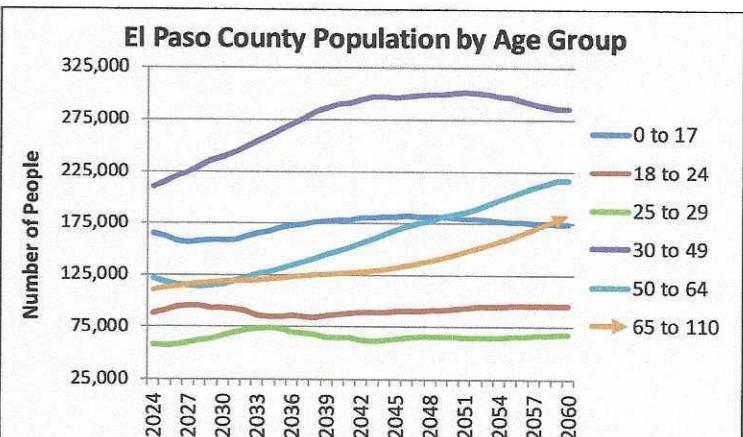


Note: Calhan, Ellicott, Peyton, Hanover, Edison, and Miami/Yoder districts all have fewer than 100 students. District 49 has a significant number of online students, which pull down the districtwide average. (Without the largest online school, the district average is 88%). *Edison had ≥ 90% graduation rate.

Sources: Colorado Department of Education; U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-year estimates



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division



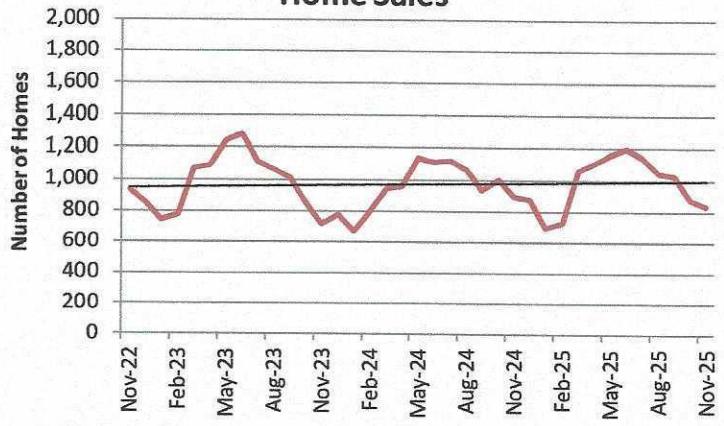
Note: The Colorado People of Color data is vintage 2024.
Source: Colorado State Demography Office

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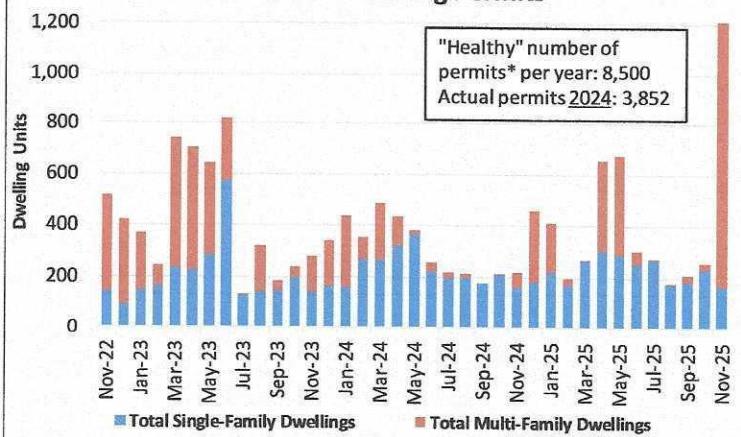
REAL ESTATE (PAGE 7)

Pikes Peak Region New & Existing Home Sales



Source: Pikes Peak REALTOR® Services Corp.

Pikes Peak Region Residential Building Permits

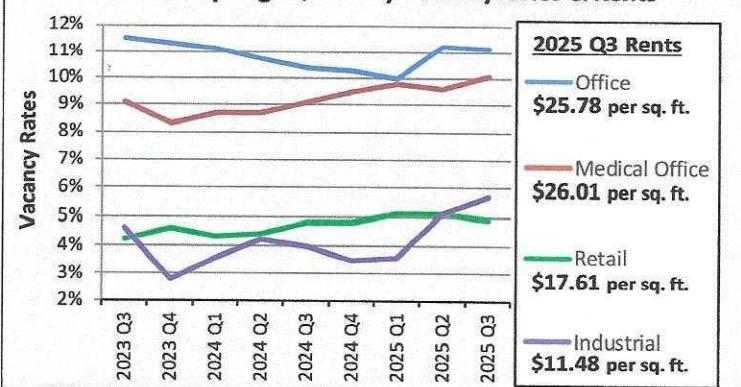


*The methodology for "healthy permits" now includes single-family and multi-family dwellings needed if we incorporate both population growth and the existing shortage of housing between 2023 and 2028. These calculations by Data-Driven Economic Strategies incorporate research by Common Sense Institute and input from the Colorado State Demography Office.

The National Association of REALTORS® has calculated that the U.S. has underbuilt roughly 6.5 million homes since the Great Recession.

Source: Pikes Peak Regional Building Department

Colorado Springs Quarterly Vacancy Rates & Rents



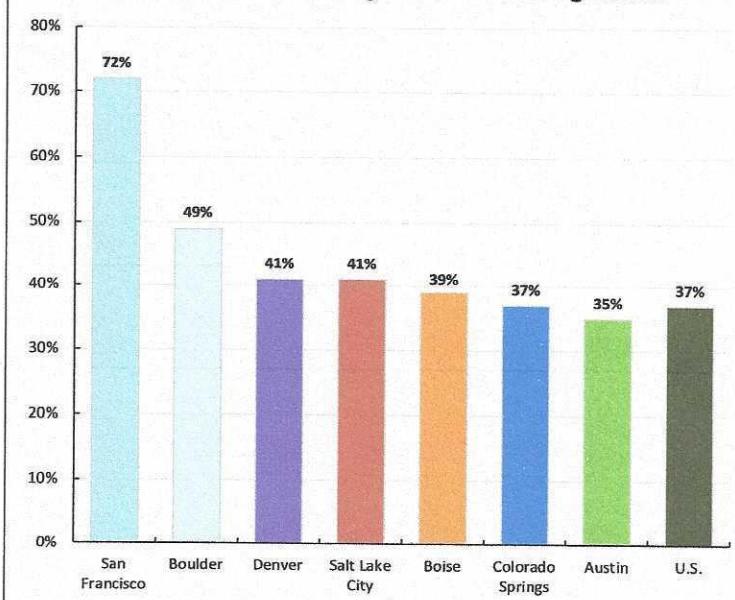
Sources: CoStar Group™; Olive Real Estate Group, Inc.

Median Existing Single-Family Home Price 2025 Q3

Location	Colorado Springs	Denver	Boise	United States
Price	\$474,100	\$651,900	\$509,800	\$426,800
1-year % Change	0.2% increase	0.4% decrease	3.7% increase	1.7% increase
MSA Rank	49	22	39	n/a

Sources: National Association of REALTORS®

2025 Q2 Cost of Housing Index for Existing Homes



Notes: The Cost of Housing Index (CHI) is defined as the percentage of the local median pre-tax income needed for mortgage payments, based on standard mortgage underwriting criteria. It includes only existing home prices.

Sources: National Association of Home Builders; Wells Fargo

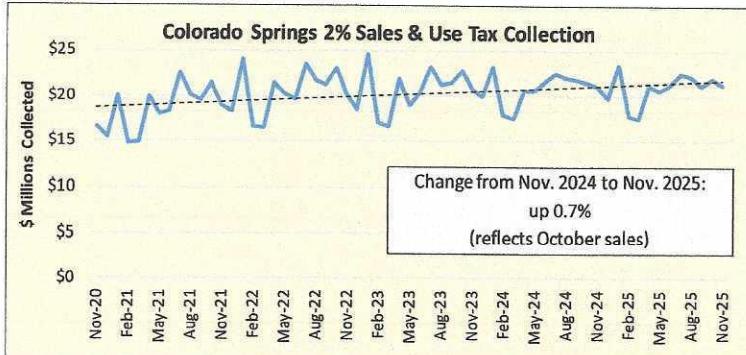
Apartment Rental Information

	Colorado Springs	Denver	Salt Lake City
Market Conditions 2025 Q2	Soft	Soft	Soft
Vacancy Rate 2024 Q2	13.4%	9.8%	11.1%
Vacancy Rate 2025 Q2	12.9%	11.5%	11.4%
Average Rent 2024 Q2	\$1,545	\$1,920	\$1,648
Average Rent 2025 Q2	\$1,498	\$1,858	\$1,630

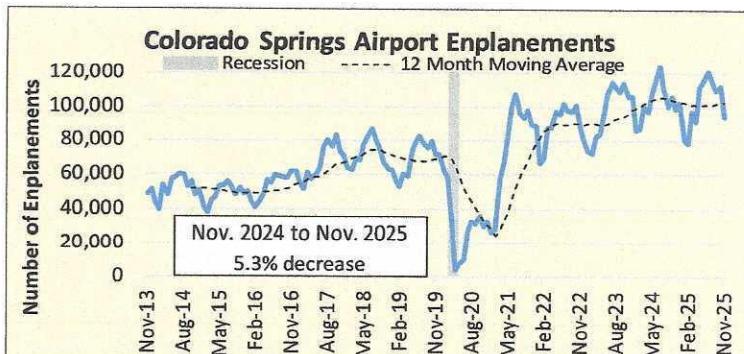
Sources: U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD), U.S. Market Conditions report

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TAXATION, VEHICLE SALES, AIR QUALITY, AND TOURISM (PAGE 8)



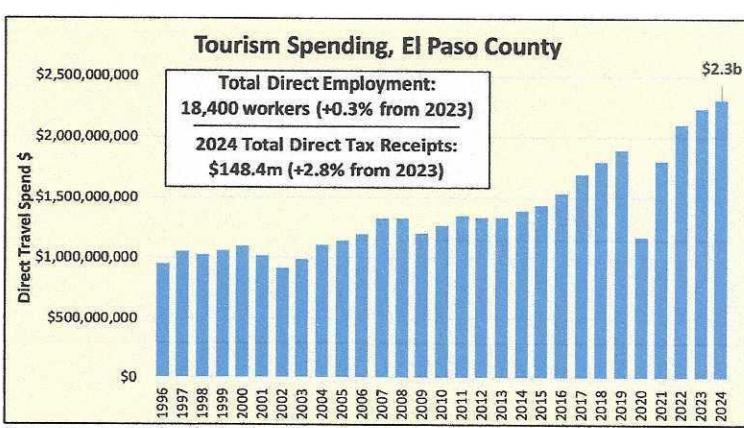
Source: City of Colorado Springs



Source: Colorado Springs Airport



Source: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis



Note: Direct travel includes day and overnight visitors.
Source: Colorado Tourism Office

2024 Air Quality		
	Colorado Springs*	U.S. Standard
Carbon Monoxide (CO) Concentration (ppm)	0.7	9.0
Particulate Matter ($\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$)	5.67	9.00
Ozone (ppm) at USAFA	0.070	0.070
Ozone (ppm) at Manitou Springs	0.073	0.070

*Locations of measurements: CO at 690 W. Hwy 24; Particulate Matter at Colorado College

Source: Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment

Hotel Occupancy Rate November 2025

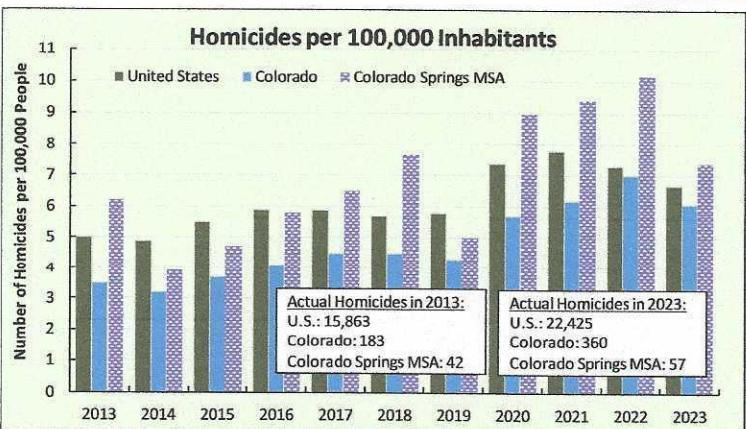
Colorado Springs	Denver
50.3%	55.9%

Hotel RevPAR* November 2025

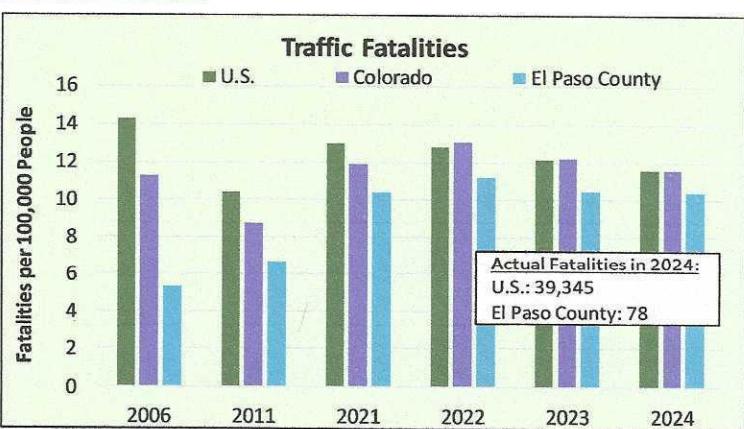
Colorado Springs	Denver
\$55.44	\$73.72

*RevPAR measures hotel revenue by taking the average room rate times hotel occupancy.

CRIME & SAFETY (PAGE 8)



Source: United States Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, Underlying Cause of Death on CDC WONDER online Database.



Sources: National Highway Safety Administration; Colorado Department of Transportation; World Bank; U.S. Census Bureau; Colorado State Demography Offices; Data-Driven Economic Strategies

2023 Mortality Rates due to Homicide per 100,000 Population				
Canada	Germany	Italy	Japan	United States
2.0	0.9	0.6	0.2	5.8

Sources: UN, World Population Prospects (2024); United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2025) – with major processing by Our World in Data

Note: "Each year when Crime in the United States is published, some entities use reported figures to compile rankings of cities and counties. These rough rankings provide no insight into the numerous variables that mold crime in a particular town, city, county, state, or region. Consequently, they lead to simplistic and/or incomplete analyses that often create misleading perceptions adversely affecting communities and their residents. Valid assessments are possible only with careful study and analysis of the range of unique conditions affecting each local law enforcement jurisdiction. The data user is, therefore, cautioned against comparing statistical data of individual reporting units from cities, metropolitan areas, states, or colleges or universities solely on the

Sworn Police Officers Per 10,000 Inhabitants in 2024	
City of Colorado Springs	14.8
City of Boise	14.0
Kansas City	21.6
City of Omaha	17.0

Sources: Federal Bureau of Investigation, Uniform Crime Report; U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division

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El Paso County Economic & Workforce Progress Report (EPR)



SUPPORTERS (PAGE 8)



THANK YOU!