

Greetings from Dwire Hall!

Highlights:

- With recent revisions, payrolls data now show a modestly declining trend for the region, but our unemployment rate is still slightly below the national level
- Sales tax collections for February transactions showed strength
- Single-family permits continued to show gains in March, but sales were sluggish
- El Paso County population grew 0.6% in the year to July 1, 2025
- It is still too soon to judge the macroeconomic impact of the conflict in the Persian Gulf; while inflation jumped in March, retail sales were healthy

**Employment:** As expected, the annual benchmark revisions to the payrolls data were somewhat ugly. At the national level, these were released in February. The main period impacted was April 2024 through December 2025. The national revisions took US payroll growth down from slow to very slow, and at the state and regional levels, employment changes over this period went from slight gains to moderate declines. For the Pikes Peak Region, civilian nonfarm payrolls as of December 2025 were revised from 333,900 to 327,400. While these are not pleasant to see, it is important to keep in mind that, with the US working-age population not growing, negative numbers will be more common and shouldn't be as alarming as they would have been a couple of years ago when job growth was needed to keep an increasing number of people employed. The revisions do not fundamentally change the overall picture that the local economy has been sluggish over the past couple of years. While I have been hopeful for a rebound this year because I think our construction and real estate cycle is past its bottom, there wasn't any sign of it in the January and February payrolls numbers, which showed declines for the region.

The state and local unemployment data also saw a significant revision partly based on updated population estimates. This has reduced the estimates of both the labor force and the number of people employed in the region. Note that these revisions have not yet been applied for the seasonally-adjusted metro area estimates shown on page 1 of the dashboard – when they are, I expect the gap that appears between the local unemployment rate and the state and national rates from mid-2024 through mid-2025 will close substantially.

While we wait for an update on the seasonally adjusted data, the raw February unemployment rate for the region was 4.6%, slightly below the national rate of 4.7% and above the state rate of 4.4% (unemployment is always high in January and February, seasonal adjustments bring it down during this period).

Note a change in the dashboard – on page 1, we've replaced job openings rates with unemployment insurance claims. This was prompted by a shift at the Bureau of Labor Statistics, which will no longer report state level data from the Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey (JOLTS) every month. The replacement, initial claims for unemployment insurance, is reported weekly, so should give us a timely

signal if there is a significant deterioration in the labor market. This indicator is also a helpful check on reading too much into alarming headlines about layoffs – in many cases, news about a particular company does not indicate an overall trend in the economy. Claims can be somewhat volatile, so I think it is helpful to look at an average over multiple weeks (the four-week average is reported in the dashboard). The moderate drift upward suggests a gradually weakening Colorado employment picture, consistent with much of our other data.

**Retail Activity:** Colorado Springs sales tax collections for February transactions were 6.7% higher than a year ago – the strongest year-on-year increase since May 2024. Given the general weakness of this indicator over the past several years and the city’s financial difficulties, this was encouraging, though it may have been boosted by the unusually mild weather. The building materials category, a source of drag through last year, was up 11.5% year-on-year (again, weather may have helped).

**Housing and Residential Real Estate:** The streak of year-over-year increases in single-family permits reached seven months in March. Continuing that may be tough – the April 2025 figure was quite strong, and it is possible we may see a negative impact from higher interest rates with the next update.

Home sales were slightly down in March relative to the same month in 2025. Home sale transactions take some time to complete, so any imprint of the rise in interest rates and any war-related caution will likely be more apparent in April and May. Active listings continue to be high as we head into the peak selling season. The April [ICE Mortgage Monitor Report](#) identified Colorado Springs as the market with the largest inventory surplus relative to its 2017-19 same month average.

The apartment data hinted that the market may have come to a turning point – rents have risen slightly and the vacancy rate ticked down for a third consecutive month.

**Commercial Real Estate:** First-quarter vacancy rates were higher in 2026 than a year ago for all four categories we track, particularly office and industrial. The total value of March permits was lackluster at \$26.9 million, though this should get a boost when the permits for the Swire Coca-Cola facility at Peak Innovation Park come in.

**Travel and Tourism:** LART collections for February transactions were down 7.1% from the previous year, but the March hotel data was more encouraging, with both occupancy and revenue per available room above their March 2025 levels (last year may have been impacted by federal travel cuts).

**County Population:** New estimates from the Census Bureau indicate that El Paso County’s population continued to grow in the year through July 1, 2025. This was mainly due to natural increase, with 9,351 births and 5,946 deaths.

The county did also see some gain from net international migration – this component was smaller than in the previous three years and represents the tail end of the 2022-24 wave of immigration into the United States. With changes in

Mid-Year County Population and Population Growth Estimates						
	Population, Jul. 1, 2025	1-yr. Chg.	1-yr. Pct. Chg.	Natural Chg.	Net Domestic Migration	Net Int'l Migration
El Paso	757,040	4,684	0.6%	3,405	164	1,037
Douglas	399,396	6,345	1.6%	2,065	3,330	935
Pueblo	169,277	-885	-0.5%	-349	-648	113
Teller	24,756	13	0.1%	-45	31	25

Data: Census Bureau. Components of change do not sum to total change due to a small residual.

immigration policy, we should not expect to see much increase (if any) next year in this category. The county was estimated to have a very slight gain from net domestic migration.

Among our neighbors, Douglas County continued to see strong growth from net domestic migration. Pueblo County's population declined, with more deaths than births as well as negative net domestic migration. Teller County saw a very slight gain – deaths exceeded births, but more people moved in than moved out.

For the population table on page 5 of the dashboard, we rely on the State Demography Office's estimates, which will be updated in the fall.

**Colorado GDP:** Colorado's real (i.e., inflation-adjusted) GDP increased at a 1.4% annual rate in the fourth quarter of 2025, according to the BEA. Colorado outpaced the national rate of 0.5% and had the 9<sup>th</sup>-fastest growth among states. For the full year 2025, the state's GDP was \$584 billion, giving us the 17<sup>th</sup>-largest state economy, behind Tennessee and ahead of Maryland. In per person terms, the state ranked 10<sup>th</sup>, with a per capita GDP of \$97,184, 8.0% higher than the national figure of \$90,004. Colorado's real growth from 2024 to 2025 was 2.1%, matching the national rate, and 18<sup>th</sup>-highest among states. Note that, since employment was weaker for the state than the US overall, this implies that Colorado saw a stronger increase in productivity (output per unit of labor).

**Colorado Business Confidence:** The Leeds Business Confidence Index, based on a survey of Colorado business leaders conducted by our colleagues in Boulder, continues to show a negative outlook. Somewhat unusually, expectations for the state economy were lower than those for the national economy. More detail can be found in the Leeds [Business Research Division's report](#). The General Assembly addressed one of the business community's main concerns, [passing a bill that will require regulations to be reviewed](#) every five years.

**Colorado Higher Education:** The state ranked 36<sup>th</sup> for public higher education appropriations per full-time equivalent student at \$8,529, compared with a national figure of \$12,082 in FY 2025, according to the [State Higher Education Finance report](#) compiled by the State Higher Education Executive Officers association. A [new analysis by the Center for American Progress](#) ranked Colorado 47<sup>th</sup> for state funding effort, which they define as postsecondary education and research appropriations as a percentage of taxable state product over FY 2018-22.

**Regional Manufacturing and Services:** The Kansas City Fed's manufacturing and services surveys have been reported for April, providing some relatively fresh evidence on the Iran war's impact so far. These are generally encouraging – though the services index dipped in April it remained in positive territory (i.e., growth continued, but slowed) and both surveys expected activity to be higher in six months. Comments in both surveys highlighted negative impacts from uncertainty.

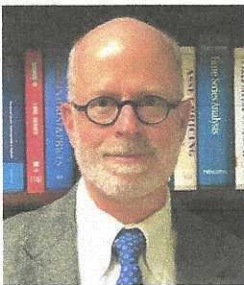
**National Macro:** The BLS reported strong *payroll growth* in March, with a preliminary gain of 178,000 in its survey of business establishments. This follows February's decline of 133,000 and a January increase of 160,000. That averages out to an average of 68,333 per month, which is considerably higher than estimates of the "breakeven" pace of job growth needed to keep unemployment from rising in our low population growth/low immigration economy. However, the numbers from the household survey were less encouraging – the *unemployment rate* ticked down from 4.4% to 4.3%, but this was driven by a decline in labor force participation – i.e., fewer people looking for work – not an increase in employment. Employment tends to be a "lagging" indicator – if the Iran war has a meaningful negative impact on the US economy, this is not one of the places where it will first become apparent.

One place where the conflict's effects are clearly showing up is in the *inflation* data – the monthly increase in the Consumer Price Index in March was 0.9%, the largest one-month jump since June 2022, with a 21.2% increase in gasoline prices. The core (i.e., excluding food and energy) index increased 0.2%. On a year-on-year basis, the overall CPI is up 3.3%, and the core CPI has risen 2.6%. Higher gas prices will also feed into the Fed's preferred measure, the Personal Consumption Expenditures (PCE) price index, which will be released after this report is finalized. While it is conventional wisdom for monetary policy to set aside transitory volatility in energy prices and focus on core inflation, the impacts of the conflict will show up there as well, albeit in a less dramatic fashion, with price increases over time across a range of goods and services as industries see higher costs.

One thing I will be watching for is whether consumers cut back on non-gasoline spending – the March *retail sales* report was somewhat reassuring in this regard. Retail and food service sales excluding gasoline saw a healthy 0.6% increase from February, seasonally adjusted. Larger tax refunds and lower withholding due to last year's H.R.1 package are coming through, boosting disposable incomes and offsetting some of the drag from gas prices. The vibes remain poor, with the University of Michigan Index of Consumer Sentiment hitting an all-time low – while this is an interesting topic for conversation, it does not seem to tell us much about what people actually do.

I'm also looking out for impacts on *real estate and construction*, with the recent uptick in mortgage rates. Here the signals are mixed. The National Association of Homebuilders/Wells Fargo Housing Market Index, which is based on surveys of single-family builders, is firmly in negative territory and dropped in April. However, the Mortgage Bankers Association index of mortgage purchase applications recovered from a brief dip and was ahead of its year-ago level for the week ended April 17.

The administration has opened up a process for refunds of the *tariffs* collected under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA), which the Supreme Court had ruled illegal. This will benefit companies which brought goods into the country, while further increasing the budget deficit. The 10% across the board tariff the administration put in place immediately after the ruling under Section 122 of the Trade Act of 1974 is limited by law to 150 days, but the administration has begun "investigations" under Section 301 of the same law into 60 trading partners for failing to take action on forced labor and 16 economies for structural excess capacity. All of our most important trading partners are covered by one or both of these investigations. Section 301 is intended to allow the US to respond to "unfair" foreign trade practices with tariffs following investigations by the US Trade Representative. I expect that we will end up in a similar place to where we were prior to the Supreme Court ruling, but businesses face more uncertainty in the meantime.

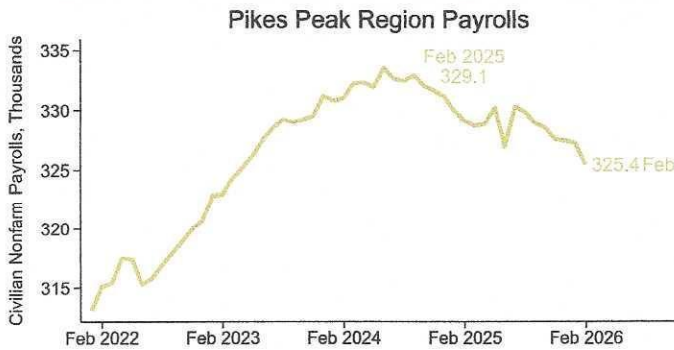


Thank you for your support!

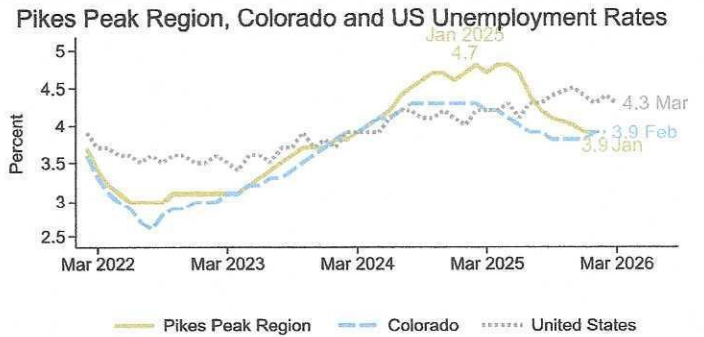
A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bill".

Bill Craighead, Ph.D.  
Director, UCCS Economic Forum  
[craighead@uccs.edu](mailto:craighead@uccs.edu)

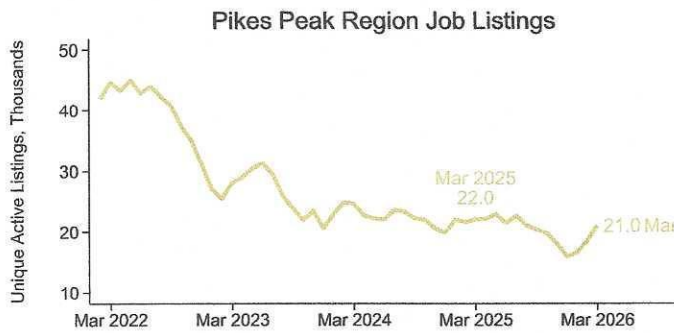
Labor Market



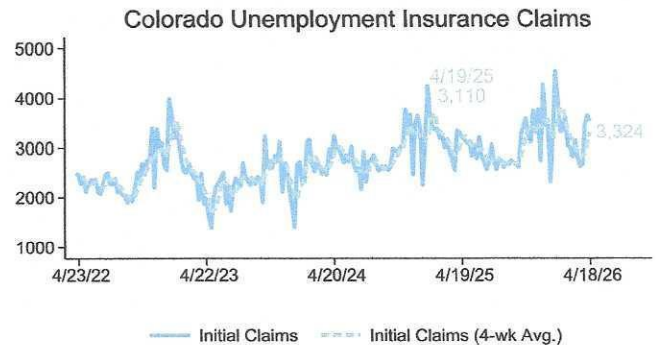
Data: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Seasonally Adjusted



Data: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Seasonally Adjusted. Not reported for Oct. 2025  
 Note: Local estimates released later than national and state data  
 A forthcoming revision will likely reduce the region's rate for mid-2024 - mid-2025



Data: The Conference Board-Lightcast Help Wanted OnLine®, courtesy Pikes Peak Workforce Center, Not Seasonally Adjusted



Data: US Employment and Training Administration  
 Claims during week ended on given date, not seasonally adjusted

Pikes Peak Region Payrolls by Sector, Feb. 2026

Sector	Employment	1 yr. % chg.
Government	55,800	-3.1
Private Education & Health Serv.	53,100	+5.6
Professional & Business Services	52,000	-0.8
Leisure & Hospitality	37,300	-4.4
Retail Trade	31,600	-2.5
Other Services	22,100	-0.9
Financial Activities	19,300	-1.5
Mining, Logging & Construction	17,500	-1.1
Manufacturing	11,400	-3.4
Transport, Warehouse & Utilities	10,700	3.9
Wholesale Trade	6,700	-2.9
Information	4,500	-8.2

Data: Colorado Labor Market Information, Current Employment Statistics Program; Bureau of Labor Statistics. Not seasonally adjusted.

Pikes Peak Region Job Postings, March 2026

Occupation	No. of Postings	Median Advertised Ann. Salary
Registered Nurses	1,188	\$93,440
Retail Salespersons	547	\$36,796
Other Computer Occupations	487	\$137,984
Heavy Truck Drivers	450	\$76,160
Software Developers	423	\$142,080
First-Line Retail Supervisors	336	\$47,744
Home Health & Pers. Care Aides	263	\$41,600
Physicians	256	\$255,744
Customer Service Reps.	245	\$41,088
Physical Therapists	233	\$94,720
Total Openings	21,009	\$67,968

Unique, active postings for top 10 occupations shown. Data: The Conference Board-Lightcast Help Wanted OnLine®, courtesy Pikes Peak Workforce Center

Armed Forces in El Paso County

2024	2023
35,535	38,320

Data: Census Bureau

Average Hourly Earnings

	Feb.	1 yr. % chg.
Pikes Peak Region	\$40.01	+8.9%
Colorado	\$39.79	+0.2%
United States	\$37.56	+3.8%

Data: Bureau of Labor Statistics. Private Sector, Not Seasonally Adjusted.

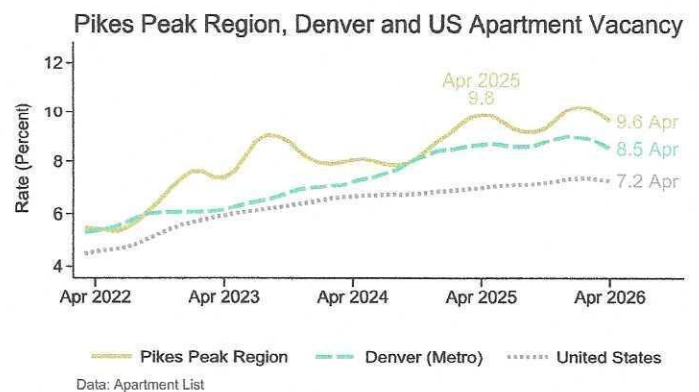
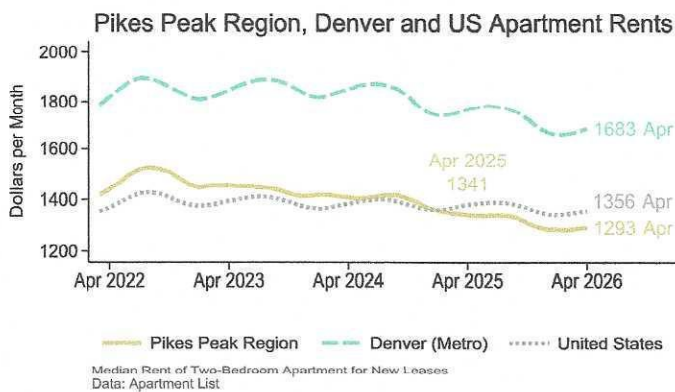
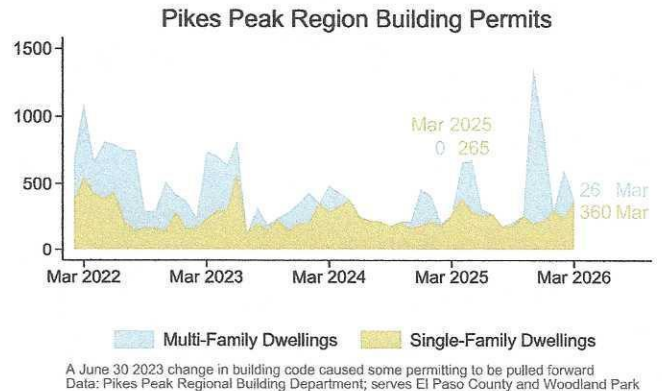
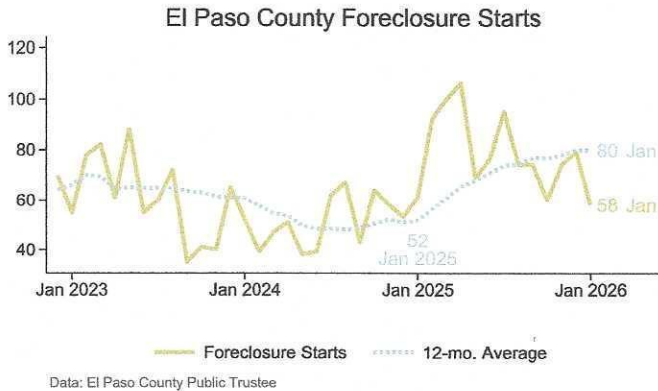
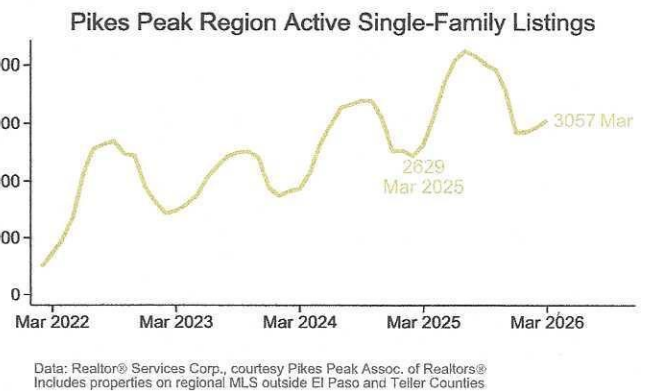
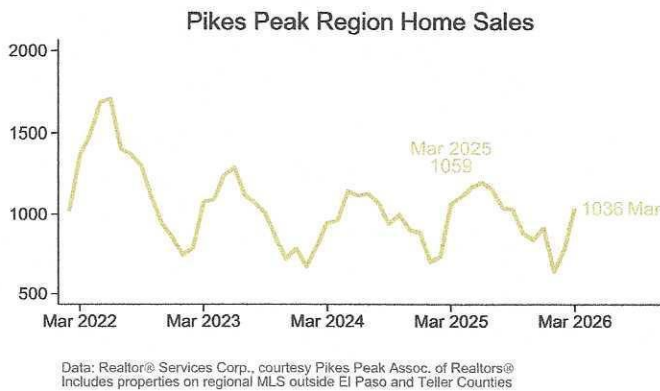
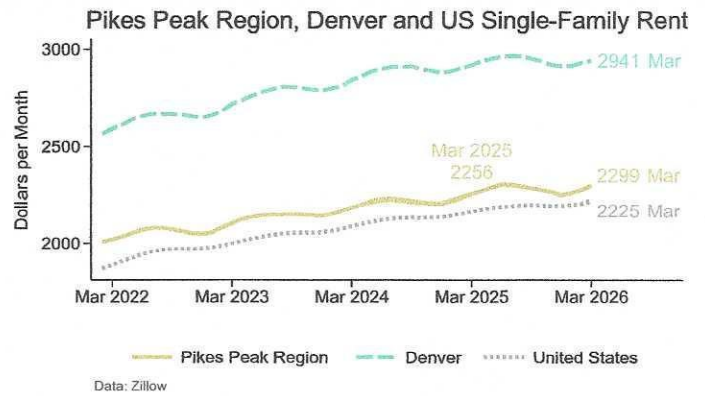
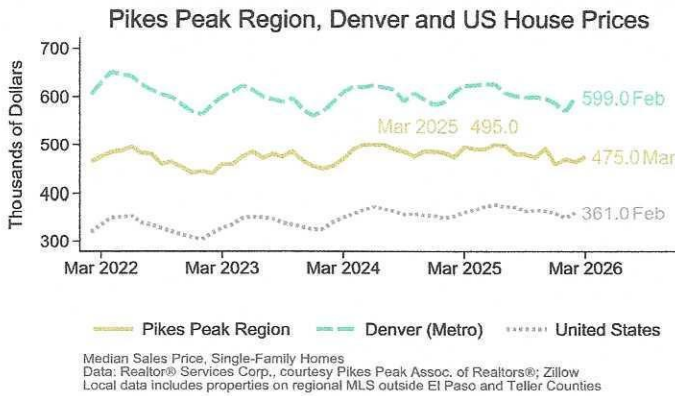
Pikes Peak Region Employment

	February	January
Employed	365,900	368,185
Unemployed	17,684	17,382

Household survey data, civilians, includes self-employed, not seasonally adjusted. Data: Colorado Department of Labor & Employment; Bureau of Labor Statistics

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Housing

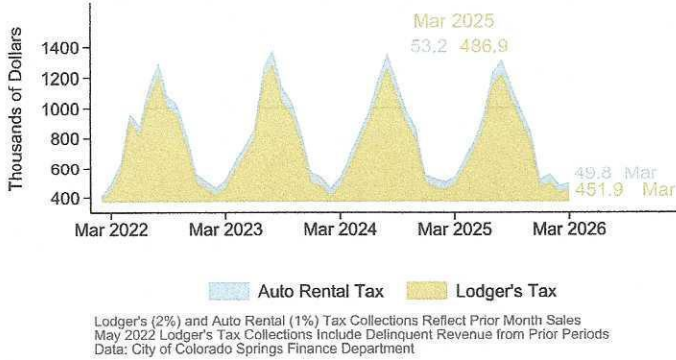


Additional indicators are reported in the annual Forum Reports available under "Economic Forum Archive" on the Economic Forum Website

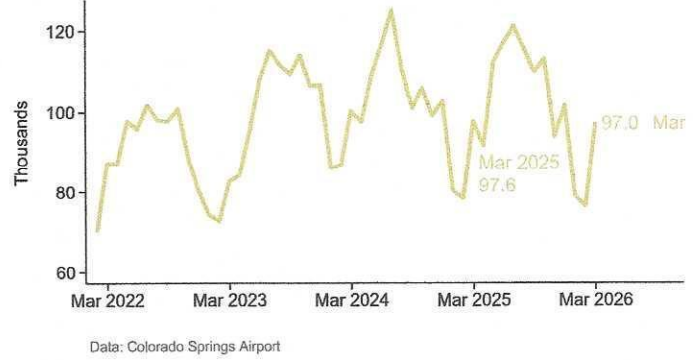
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Travel and Tourism

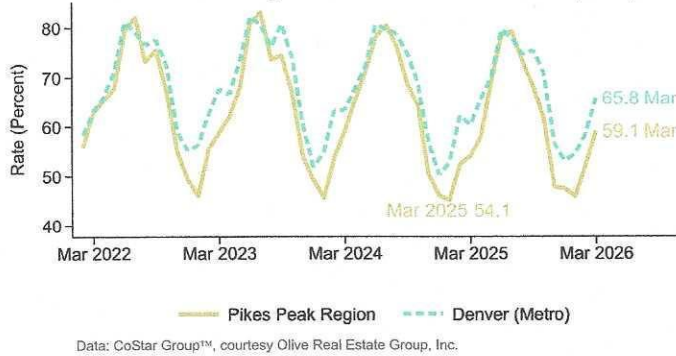
City of Colorado Springs LART Revenue



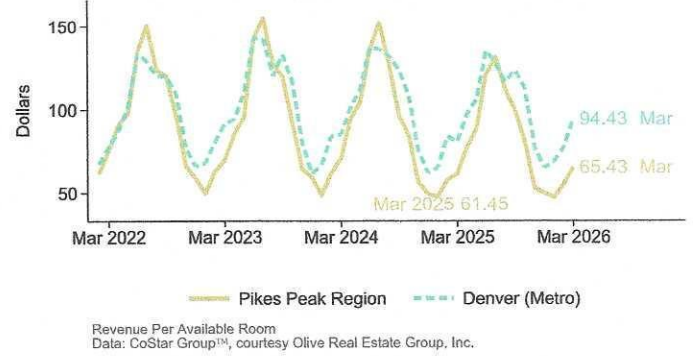
Colorado Springs Airport Enplanements



Pikes Peak Region and Denver Hotel Occupancy

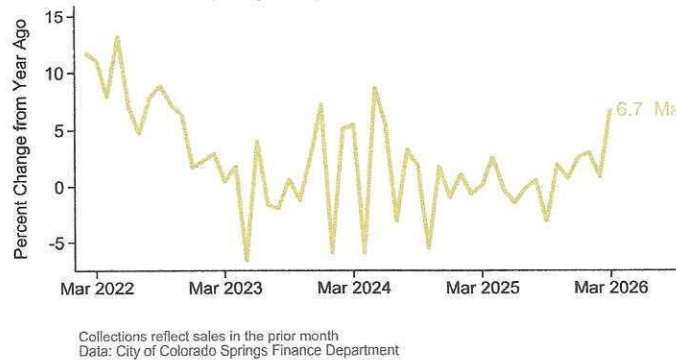


Pikes Peak Region and Denver Hotel RevPAR

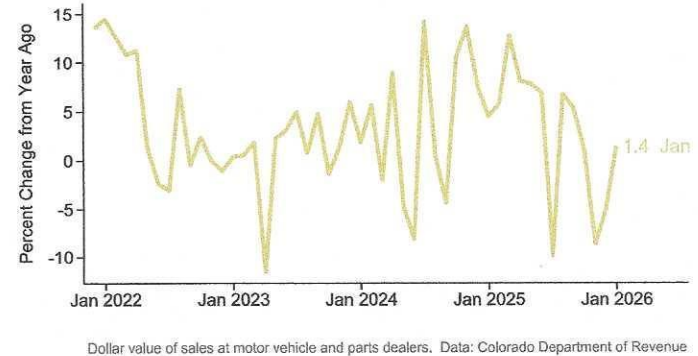


Consumers

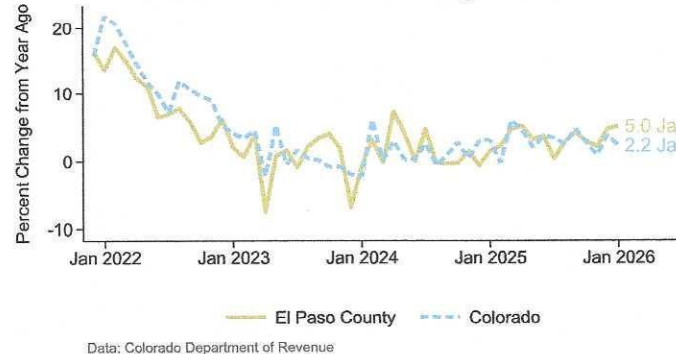
Colorado Springs City Sales and Use Tax Collections



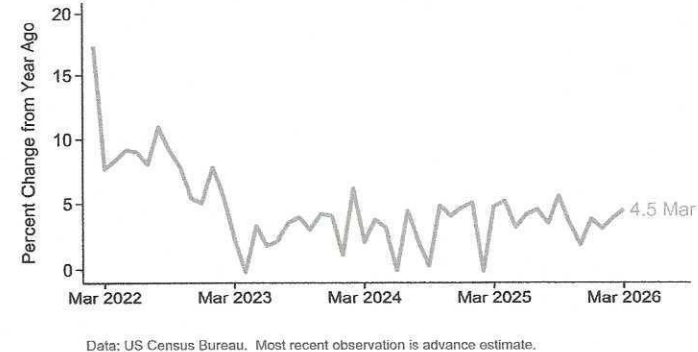
El Paso County Auto Dealer Sales



Colorado and El Paso County Retail Sales



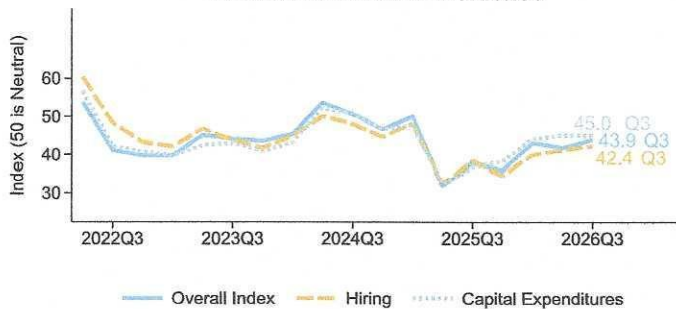
US Retail and Food Service Sales



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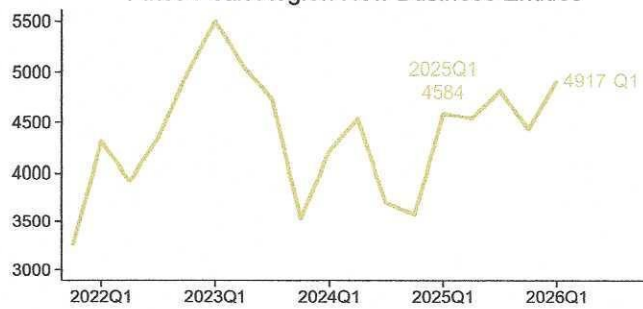
Business

Colorado Business Confidence



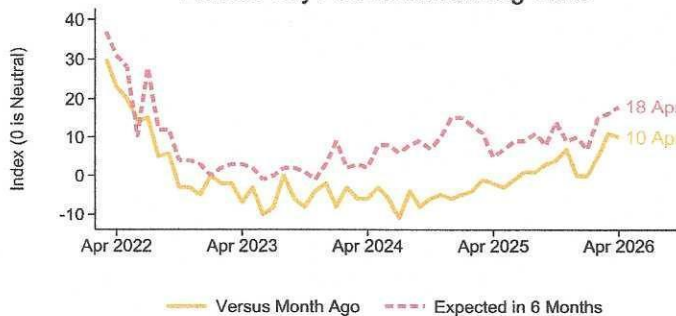
Expectations of Industry Hiring Plans and Industry Capital Expenditures are 2 of 6 components of the Leeds Business Confidence Index (LBCI)  
Data: Business Research Division, CU Boulder Leeds School of Business

Pikes Peak Region New Business Entities



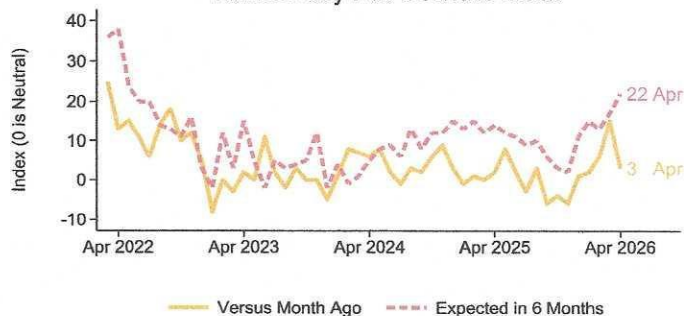
Data: Colorado Department of State  
Note: Filing fees were reduced from \$50 to \$1 between July 2022 and May 2023

Kansas City Fed Manufacturing Index



Includes Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Wyoming, Northern New Mexico and Western Missouri. Data: Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City, Seasonally Adjusted

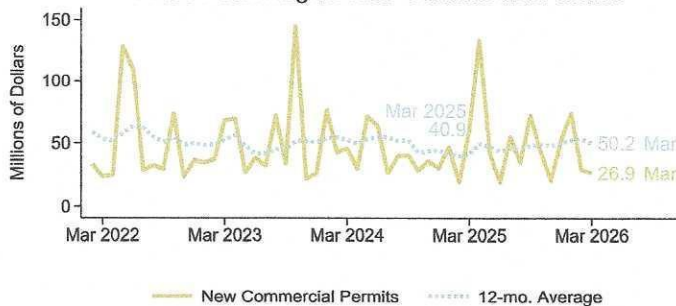
Kansas City Fed Services Index



Includes Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Wyoming, Northern New Mexico and Western Missouri. Data: Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City, Seasonally Adjusted

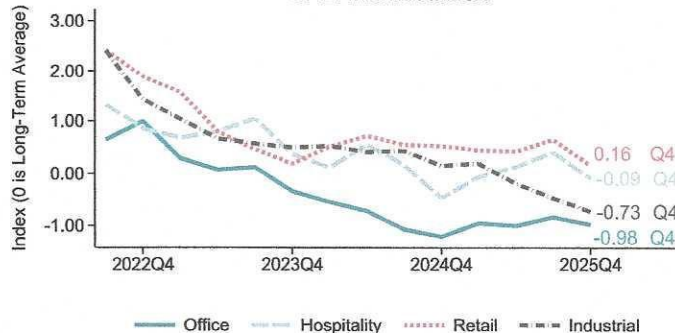
Commercial Real Estate

Pikes Peak Region New Commercial Permits



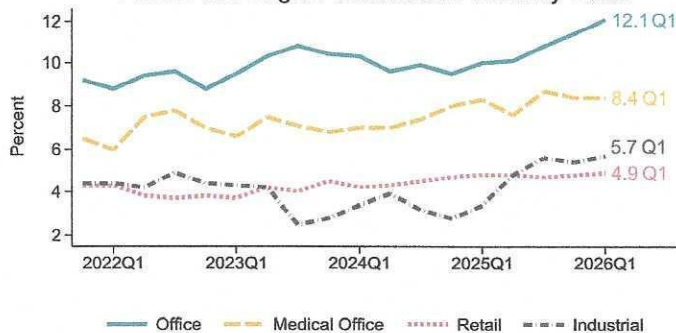
Dollar valuation of new commercial permits including construction as well as electrical, mechanical and plumbing. Not adjusted for inflation  
Data: Pikes Peak Regional Building Department, serves El Paso County and Woodland Park

CRE Market Index



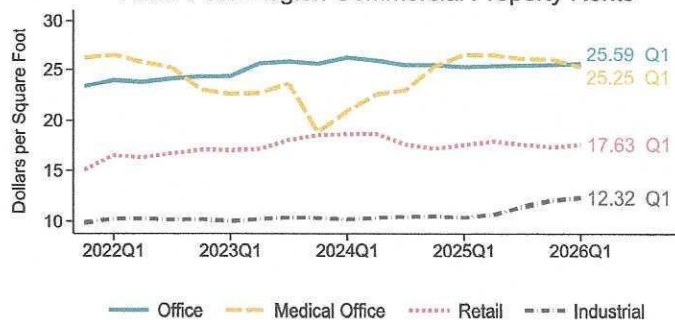
Data: Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta

Pikes Peak Region Commercial Vacancy Rates



Percent vacant and available. Data: CoStar Group™, courtesy Olive Real Estate Group, Inc.

Pikes Peak Region Commercial Property Rents

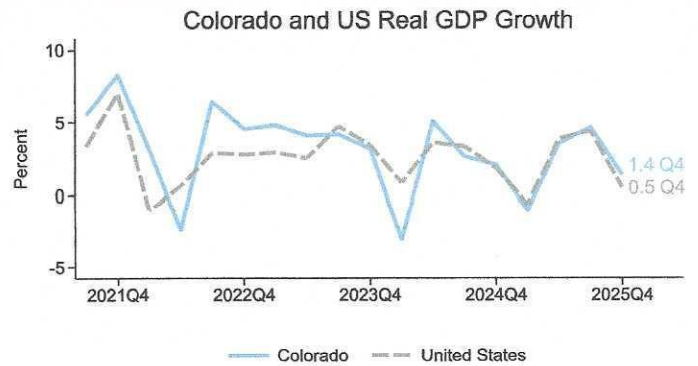


Data: CoStar Group™, courtesy Olive Real Estate Group, Inc.  
Retail and industrial are triple net, office and medical office are gross rent

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Output

	GDP (2024)	Real GDP Growth	
		2024	5-yr. Avg.
Pikes Peak Region	\$56.4 bn	2.6%	3.6%
Boulder MSA	\$39.3 bn	1.5%	2.5%
Denver MSA	\$330.2 bn	1.8%	3.7%
Ft. Collins MSA	\$28.5 bn	1.1%	2.2%
Grand Junction MSA	\$9.5 bn	2.6%	1.9%
Greeley MSA	\$29.5 bn	6.5%	2.8%
Pueblo MSA	\$8.8 bn	0.5%	1.4%
Colorado	\$557.6 bn	2.0%	3.2%
United States	\$29.3 tr	2.8%	2.5%



Data: Bureau of Economic Analysis, Seasonally Adjusted Annual Rate

Data: Bureau of Economic Analysis. MSA: Metropolitan Statistical Area. 5-yr. avg. to 2024.

Schools

	K-12 Enrollment (2025-26)	Avg. Teacher Salary (2025-26)	4-yr. Graduation Rate (2025)	Matriculation Rate (2024)		CMAS: % Meeting or Exceeding Expectations (2025)	
				Total	4-year Inst.	8th gr. ELA	8th gr. Math
Harrison 2	12,011	\$60,311	89.8%	52.6%	21.9%	37.1%	22.9%
Widefield 3	8,976	\$66,709	82.9%	49.5%	29.0%	43.0%	27.0%
Fountain 8	7,225	\$70,963	90.7%	55.0%	30.2%	33.7%	18.6%
Colorado Springs 11	22,363	\$63,635	76.7%	47.0%	20.5%	39.6%	29.2%
Academy 20	26,131	\$67,136	95.4%	66.1%	51.0%	62.8%	52.9%
Lewis-Palmer 38	6,127	\$59,958	93.2%	68.5%	52.7%	54.1%	48.2%
District 49*	25,932	\$60,573	63.5%	31.2%	13.7%	47.6%	29.5%

Data: Colorado Dept. of Education. ELA: English Language Arts. Data shown for districts enrolling more than 5,000 students; data for other districts included in annual Forum Report. \*D49 figures impacted by statewide GOAL HS charter school; higher graduation rates for Falcon HS (93.4%) Sand Creek HS (92.0%) and Vista Ridge HS (93.4%). Avg. salaries include charter schools.

Demographics and Cost of Living

Population and Population Forecasts					Mortgage Payment Share of Median Income, Feb. 2026	
	2015	2025	2035	2045		
El Paso County	677,974	757,064	845,420	932,452	Pikes Peak Region	40.5%
0-4	46,325 (6.8%)	45,280 (6.0%)	51,330 (6.1%)	50,080 (5.4%)	Denver (Metro)	43.0%
5-17	121,758 (18.0%)	116,696 (15.4%)	118,995 (14.1%)	131,888 (14.1%)	United States	40.7%
18-24	76,624 (11.3%)	91,320 (12.1%)	84,761 (10.0%)	90,020 (9.7%)	Estimated monthly payment for home purchased at local median price as share of median income. Data: Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta	
25-64	352,968 (52.1%)	391,476 (51.7%)	468,835 (55.5%)	528,865 (56.7%)	Cost of Living Index 2025	
65-79	62,533 (9.2%)	89,396 (11.8%)	83,225 (9.8%)	85,579 (9.2%)	Pikes Peak Region	100.9
80+	17,766 (2.6%)	22,896 (3.0%)	38,274 (4.5%)	46,020 (4.9%)	Denver (Metro)	110.0
Colorado	5.45 mil.	5.99 mil.	6.53 mil.	7.01 mil.	Relative to National Average of 100 Data: Council for Community and Economic Research, courtesy Co Springs Chamber & EDC	
United States	325.59 mil.	348.16 mil.	357.31 mil.	362.90 mil.		

Age group shares of total in parentheses. Data: Colorado State Demography Office, Congressional Budget Office

Selected Population Characteristics, 2024

	El Paso County	Colorado	United States	Pikes Peak Region Estimated Living Wages
Median Household Income	\$91,009	\$97,113	\$81,604	Living Wage: 1 Adult with No Children
Poverty Rate	8.5%	9.6%	12.1%	Living Wage: 1 Adult with 2 Children
Median Age	35.5	38.0	39.2	Living Wage: 2 Working Adults w/ 2 Children (per adult)
Bachelor's Deg. or Higher (≥25)	42.8%	47.8%	36.8%	
Veteran (civilian pop. ≥18)	15.6%	7.0%	5.9%	
Military (≥16)	5.9%	0.9%	0.5%	

Data: Census Bureau

Data: MIT Living Wage Calculator

Note: "Pikes Peak Region" refers to the metropolitan statistical area of El Paso and Teller counties unless otherwise specified. Data subject to revisions. Please do not reproduce without permission.

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