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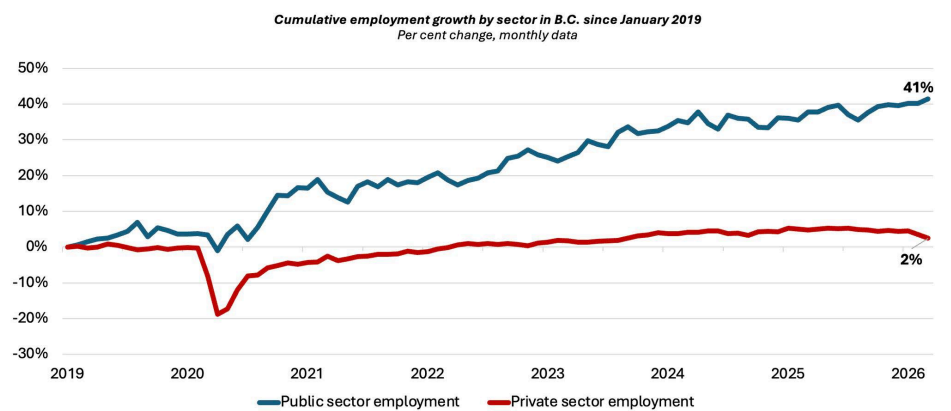
LABOUR MARKET UPDATE – FEBRUARY/MARCH 2026

B.C.'s labour market weakened sharply through February and March. Employment fell by nearly 40,000 over the two months, driven largely by losses in full time private sector jobs. The unemployment rate rose to 6.7%, the highest level since 2021 and, outside the pandemic period, the highest since February 2016.

Monthly labour market data can be volatile and two months do not make a trend. But the recent losses are difficult to dismiss because of the magnitude of the decline and because they fit a longer term pattern of private sector weakness. Between January 2019 and March 2026, private sector employment in B.C. has increased by just 2%, compared with a 41% increase in public sector employment. B.C. ranks last among all provinces for private sector employment growth over this period.

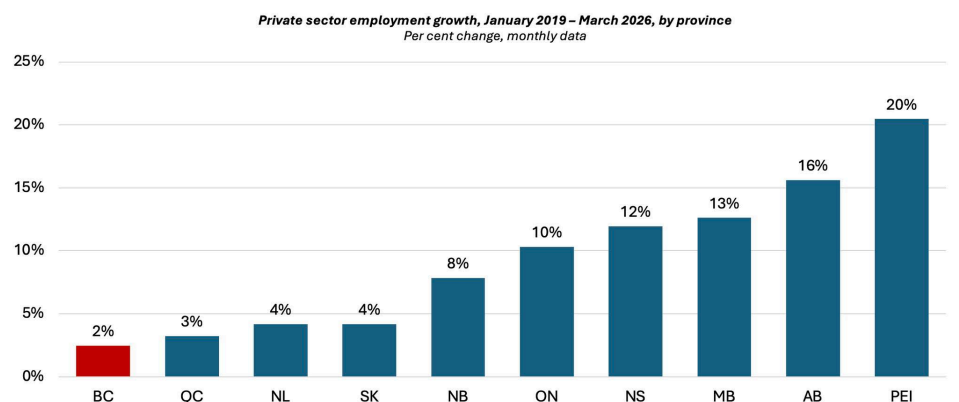
This matters for more than the monthly jobs numbers. The private sector is where the tax base that funds public services is built. It is also where investment, productivity growth, and long term gains in living standards largely come from. A prolonged period of weak private sector hiring has real fiscal and economic consequences.

Private sector employment growth largely flat since 2019



Source: Statistics Canada, Table 14-10-0288-01 Employment by class of worker, monthly, seasonally adjusted and unadjusted (x 1,000), BCBC calculations.

B.C. ranks last in private sector employment growth since 2019



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The latest figures reinforce the need for a sharper focus on B.C.'s competitiveness and productivity. A healthy labour market cannot rely indefinitely on public sector job growth. Stronger private sector investment and hiring will be essential if the province is to support rising incomes, sustainable public services, and long-term economic growth.