

# Last remaining evacuation orders lifted for Caldor Fire

BY MICHAEL MCGOUGH  
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The last remaining evacuation orders and warnings in place for the Caldor Fire were lifted Monday, the El Dorado County Sheriff's Office and U.S. Forest Service said.

Forest Service officials reported the blaze at 221,775 acres with 93% containment as of Monday morning. Full containment is expected by Oct. 16.

Most major evacuation orders, covering the South Lake Tahoe area on the east zone of the fire and the Pollock Pines and Sly Park areas on the west

side, were lifted by mid-September.

Evacuation warnings and orders remained in place in sparsely populated areas up until Monday.

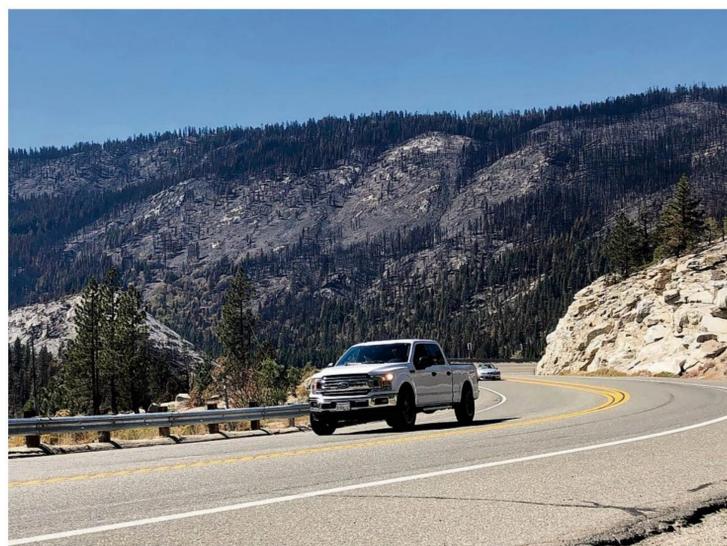
The California Governor's Office of Emergency Services in a Monday morning update said only about 120 El Dorado County residents remained evacuated due to the Caldor Fire. At one point around the end of August, about 50,000 were displaced.

In lifting the last remaining evacuations, the Sheriff's Office advised the public to "stay vigilant on current fire conditions" and to be aware that many fire,

law enforcement, public works and utility workers remain in the area responding to the Caldor Fire. There may be some localized road closures.

The fire ignited Aug. 14 south of Pollock Pines, then spread northeast along Highway 50 toward the Lake Tahoe Basin. The city of South Lake Tahoe was evacuated for about a week, between late August and early September.

More than 780 structures were destroyed, many of them homes, most in the town of Grizzly Flats during the fire's initial sprint in mid-August. At least two civilians were injured; no fatalities were reported.



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Vehicles drive on Highway 50 in El Dorado County between Kyburz and Meyers on Sept. 20 after the road reopened to residents and building owners after a long closure because of the Caldor Fire.

Part of Highway 50 was closed to the general public for just over a month, shuttering the travel route from Sacramento to South Lake Tahoe from Aug. 20

until the last stretch between Kyburz and Meyers reopened Sept. 21.

The Caldor Fire is the 15th largest and 16th most destructive wildfire in

recorded California history, Cal Fire records show.

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Daniel Savala, left, and his fiancée, Albanita Erebia, with dog Kodah, look Friday at the progress of their bathroom remodel in the Sacramento home they purchased earlier this year.

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## HOMEBUYING

whites on a national and state level.

The average homeownership rate for California households is about 55%. For Latinos, the homeownership rate was 44.1% in 2018, according to 2019 Census American Community Survey data, compared to 63.2% of whites, 59.7% of Asian or Pacific Islanders and 36.8% of Blacks.

In 2016, the national median wealth of a white family was \$171,000, according to an analysis by the California Budget & Policy Center. For Latino families, who are less likely to own a home than white families, the median wealth was \$20,700.

The Newsom adminis-

tration, using part of the state's unprecedented \$80 billion budget surplus, is launching a new effort to help first-time buyers.

The new state budget includes \$100 million to expand the state's First Time Homebuyer Assistance Program, "which helps first-time homebuyers make a down payment, secure a loan, and pay closing costs on a home," according to the budget.

"This is one of the primary vehicles that the state uses to help connect families (who) -- without the help and down payment assistance -- would probably otherwise not be able to achieve the 'American Dream,'" said Secre-

tary of the Business, Consumer Services and Housing Agency Lourdes M. Castro Ramirez. "The program is very much designed and focused on bridging the homeownership wealth gap that exists among Latinos, Black Californians and low- to moderate-income households."

### LEARNING HOW TO BUY A HOME

Apart from down payment assistance, some new Latino home buyers say they benefited from calling on an expert to walk them through the process.

Lobbyist and San Juan Unified School District President Paula Villescaz had saved money for two years for a down payment and set her sights on buying a single-family home in the Sacramento region.

She turned to a real estate agent with experience coaching Latino first-time buyers to figure out how to do it.

To afford her town home's down payment, Villescaz used her savings and took out a loan from her retirement plan. She also qualified for a loan from the Federal Housing Administration.

The process was competitive and Villescaz remembers placing at least 10 offers on homes. After months of searching, Villescaz nearly gave up until the highest bid for a \$190,000 Carmichael town home she also placed an offer on fell through.

She began house-hunting in 2017 aiming for the stability she missed growing up in a family that faced evictions, shared rooms with other relatives and moved over and over.

"I knew that homeownership and owning property is certainly one of the main ways in America that we establish any kind of intergenerational wealth and so I had always been interested," Villescaz, 32, said. "It was always a goal of mine to own a home."

Villescaz recommends that young people should find a trusted real estate agent and get familiar with programs for first-time home buyers.

"My learned lesson was that it wasn't as far out of reach as I thought it was," she said. "It's definitely a challenge but it's not an insurmountable one."

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## Legacy of racist housing policies

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Experts say a legacy of discriminatory housing policies that hindered people of color from buying homes during the 20th century have prevented Latinos from buying homes and building generational wealth at the same rate as whites.

In the wake of mass foreclosures brought on by the Great Depression, government entities like the Home Owners' Loan Corporation made changes to its appraisal process during the 1930s.

Color-coded maps were used to grade loan risks in more than 200 cities in the U.S. by using an "A" through "D" scale. Officials gave higher grades to majority Caucasian neighborhoods and lower grades to racially diverse neighborhoods, deeming them "high risk" for lending and homeownership.

Sara Kimberlin, a senior policy analyst for the California Policy & Budget Center, said those discriminatory redlining practices made it difficult for Black and Latino families to obtain mortgages in certain neighborhoods.

Noli Brazil, an assistant professor of community and regional development at UC Davis, said redlining is commonly discussed as a "Black and white"

issue. He added the consequences redlining has had on Latino communities are overlooked.

Starting in the 1920s, racially restrictive housing covenants, contractual agreements used by homeowners, real estate agents and neighborhood associations barred people of color from buying homes in certain neighborhoods because of their race.

"Public and private actors were ... basically steering investment away from these neighborhoods," Brazil said. "It led to up to cascading negative financial effects."

This week, Gov. Gavin Newsom signed a law that would establish a process that removes racially restrict language from housing deeds.

"Buying a home is a big accomplishment and no one, especially people of color, should have to find discriminatory language in their deeds," said the bill's author, Assemblymember Kevin McCarty, D-Sacramento. "When I bought my first home in my 20s, I discovered this kind of egregious language and was deeply offended, especially because both my partner and I would not have been allowed to live there if the covenant was still enforced."

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## COLLEGES

stated in a news release that he understands how important it is for there to be diversity in the institutions that shape our country.

"To support a highly educated workforce, develop future leaders and build a more inclusive democracy and economy, we must ensure Latino students thrive," Padilla said.

### WHAT IS A HISPANIC-SERVING INSTITUTION?

HSIs are colleges and universities where at least 25% of undergraduates are Hispanic and no less than half of students are low-income, as defined by the Higher Education Act.

Talks to create the HSI designation began in the 1980s when Congress held a series of discussions regarding Latinos' lack of access to higher education, low college graduation rates and limited financial support at the institutions where they

were most concentrated, reports New America. After continuous advocacy, HSIs were recognized and received special funding in 1995.

### ARE THERE PROGRAMS FOR LATINO STUDENTS?

In addition to meeting program requirements, schools must put federal grants toward programs that improve the education of Latinos and other underserved students. Grants can be used toward the development of an HSI, increasing STEM pathways and advancing post-baccalaureate opportunities, according to the U.S. Department of Education.

As an example, CSU Stanislaus recently received nearly \$5 million to fund a STEM project that would engage Latino students in year-round programming to improve retention, persistence and graduation rates in those fields, according to the

university. The project is set to commence in October and funding would carry the project through the end of September 2026.

Funding would provide students with a first-year STEM immersion program, articulation support for transfer students, internships, career development and faculty and peer mentoring.

### WHICH COLLEGES HAVE THE MOST LATINOS?

Community colleges in California enroll the largest number of Latino students. At Imperial Valley College, 90% of students are Latino, according to CollegesSimply.

In terms of four-year colleges, CSU Los Angeles leads with the highest percentage of Latino students at 62.6%.

The database further shows that in the Central Valley, UC Merced's Latino population is 48.5%. Last year, for the first time in history, Latinos were the largest demographic to be admitted into UC schools. They made up 36% of that year's fresh-

man class.

### WHAT HELP DO THE COLLEGES WANT?

The Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities wants the new caucus to focus on securing adequate and equitable funding to transform HSIs, said Lena Rodriguez, the association's senior vice president of policy and government relations.

She said it's through this increase in funding that HSIs will be able to improve laboratories, classrooms and more so that students have state of the art equipment.

"These leaders will make significant contributions to not only our country but to the communities in which they live," she said.

### WHAT CAN CONGRESS DO?

Having voices that advocate for HSIs in Congress is key to the advancement of Latino students in the U.S. workforce, said Antonio Flores, president and CEO of the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities

(HACU), in a press release. Congress can create policies that advance Latino success and advocate for additional funding to be put toward HSIs.

"We hope that through their leadership and the support of more Members of Congress, we can continue to heighten appreciation and federal sup-

port for HSIs, resulting in increased funding allocations and enactment of laws that benefit HSIs and the students they serve -- the workforce of tomorrow," he said in another statement.

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