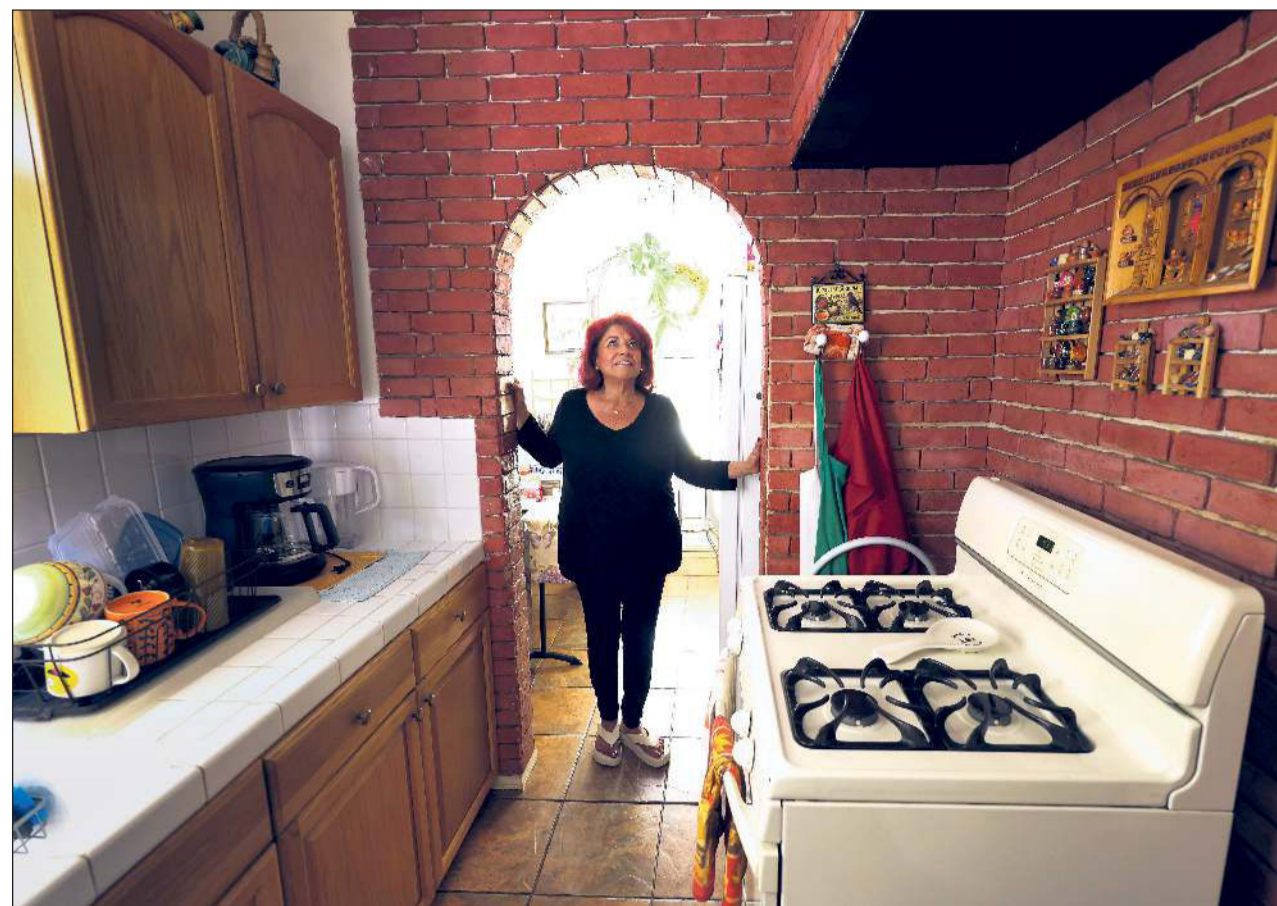


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Photographs by GENARO MOLINA Los Angeles Times

**RETIRED** DMV worker Patricia Payan has leased her home in El Sereno since 1986. She is now in escrow to buy her house from the state. But many renters fear they may remain in escrow for as long as two years.

## As fires ravage the Southland, experts warn of a worse autumn

Dry vegetation abounds, and Santa Ana winds could arrive early this year.

BY HAYLEY SMITH

For the first time in years, Southern California has found itself once again besieged by wildfire. In recent days, multiple blazes have exploded across heat-seared hillsides, blanketing the region in ash and smoke, threatening homes and communication towers and sending thousands of residents fleeing for their lives.

But as crews struggle to contain the 37,000-acre Line fire in San Bernardino County, the 23,000-acre Airport fire in Orange and Riverside counties, and the 51,000-acre Bridge fire in Los Angeles and San Bernar-

### Evacuees wait and wonder

More than 19,000 Riverside County residents are under evacuation orders. **CALIFORNIA, B1**

dino counties, experts warn that the season is just getting started.

The impending arrival of hot Santa Ana winds — combined with two years of overgrown vegetation — all but ensure that this fall will be fraught with danger.

“The odds definitely favor a continuation — and maybe even an escalation — of Southern California fire season over the next couple of months,” said Daniel Swain, a climate scientist with UCLA.

The worst setup for wildfire conditions in Southern [See Fires, A7]

## Waiting for their slice of the American dream

Tenants in Caltrans-owned homes want to be owners, but the pace of sales is still a source of frustration

BY LIAM DILLON



**CALTRANS** sold this vacant property in El Sereno to San Gabriel Valley Habitat for Humanity, which will remodel it.

For nearly four decades, Patricia Payan has lived in a leased version of the suburban ideal, a two-bedroom, one-bathroom home on Sheffield Avenue in El Sereno.

Payan rents the house from the state of California, one of hundreds publicly owned in the community because of a freeway that was planned but never built. Living there for so long, Payan has made countless memories and put personal touches on the property. Her son and daughter had their birthday parties in the same backyard where her grandchildren now do. She redid the floors in the kitchen herself and paid for her own gardener.

The one thing missing for Payan was the home's title. That's now changing. Six years after the freeway was officially declared dead, Payan is in escrow to buy her house from the California Department of Transportation.

“I've always wanted this,” said Payan, 77. “It's a dream to be a property owner.”

Sales of the homes, apartments, lots and other properties owned by Caltrans are the final step toward healing the wound opened in the mid-20th century by plans to complete the 710 Freeway through the San Gabriel Valley. Decades of [See Property, A9]



GINA FERAZZI Los Angeles Times

**THE LINE** fire left behind a scorched hillside along Highway 330 in San Bernardino County on Sunday.

## Pocketbook woes may sway Nevada

Harris has a thin edge over Trump in the key state, but the cost of living has some voters doubting Democrats.

BY JAMES RAINEY

LAS VEGAS — Vice President Kamala Harris has never met Maria Rodriguez. She probably never will. But the Democratic presidential nominee should be worried about Rodriguez, and voters like her.

The single mother of three from Henderson, Nev., is a onetime Democratic voter who frets about the economy (meaning: the price of just about everything) and says she plans to vote for former President Trump.

Rodriguez cast her ballot for Joe Biden four years ago, hoping for better times. But, regardless of what government statisticians might say about the economy, the 36-year-old finds it's harder to pay the bills today, even though she is working two or three jobs as a nurse and home healthcare worker.

“Going to the market is really hard right now,” Rodriguez said as she pushed a mostly empty cart up an aisle of a Dollar Tree discount store last week. “Sometimes, before, you would go in with 100 bucks and come out with a full cart. It was pretty OK. Now, with 100 bucks, you can get maybe 10 things. It's living paycheck to paycheck.”

“I was potentially a Democrat,” she said. “But I have changed my way of [See Nevada, A6]

## Trump's golf course flirts with disaster

Known for landslides, scenic Rancho Palos Verdes is also home to club

BY HAILEY BRANSON-POTTS

A mile west of Trump National Golf Club in Rancho Palos Verdes, a road sign warns: “Use Extreme Caution. Constant Land Movement.”

A few blocks away, a sign just off Palos Verdes Drive South touts the Estates at Trump National Golf Club Los Angeles, where potential residents can “build your custom dream home.”

Those signs sum up the promise and the peril of Trump's clifftop, open-to-the-public golf course, which he bought from bankrupted developers in 2002 after the 18th hole slid into the ocean. The club has even played a role in Trump's New York fraud trial.

On Friday morning, Trump is scheduled to hold a news conference at his club [See Golf course, A6]



CAROLYN COLE Los Angeles Times

**FORMER** President Trump purchased his golf course in Rancho Palos Verdes, seen in 2022, after the 18th hole fell into the ocean. Now, the city is a disaster zone.

### Unusually active year for L.A. quakes

Thursday's magnitude 4.7 temblor north of Malibu is the region's latest moderate event. **CALIFORNIA, B1**

### Pac-12 rebuilds with four schools

Conference adds Boise State, Fresno State, Colorado State and San Diego State. **SPORTS, B7**

### Weather

Turning sunny. L.A. Basin: 80/63. **B6**

### Tech billionaire takes spacewalk

Jared Isaacman carries out first private mission hundreds of miles above Earth. **BUSINESS, A8**

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# Tenants anxiously await becoming owners

**[Property, from A1]** empty, boarded-up houses and lax oversight have led to blight and grievances against the public agency, exacerbated by Los Angeles' housing affordability crisis.

Caltrans' tenants, including Payan and other longtime low- and middle-income residents, are gaining the opportunity to buy their homes at reduced prices, the only way they say they could afford to become homeowners. The public agency is selling vacant properties to affordable housing providers who are repairing them for new occupants.

But the continued slow pace of the sales has meant mounting frustration for Caltrans tenants, city officials and housing advocates looking to reawaken their neighborhoods. Renters fear they may remain in escrow for as long as two years before Caltrans completes repairs to their homes. Some vacant properties have yet to hit the market. Notably, the historic Pasadena childhood home of chef Julia Child has been empty for 40 years, and there's no timeline for it to be sold.

Jason Brown, who is buying the home in El Sereno he's rented with his partner since 2007, said he's tempered his enthusiasm. He's seen little progress since entering escrow in January.

"I'm going to believe it when I see it," said Brown, 53.

The 4½-mile gap between the northern end of the 710 Freeway in Alhambra and the 210 Freeway in Pasadena emerged in the 1970s. Other sections of the freeway were built, but South Pasadena activists stalled the full route's completion. Caltrans already had acquired 460 properties along the corridor it intended to demolish, and the homes sat in limbo until 2018, when state lawmakers killed the freeway.

While the freeway's fate wended through years of court and political hearings, the transportation agency rented some houses while allowing others to remain vacant and fall into disrepair. By 2015, the agency had listed more than three dozen as uninhabitable. Today, blocks filled with otherwise vibrant small cottages in El Sereno are marred by multiple houses with plywood and "No Trespassing" signs in their front windows.

It's long been anticipated that if the freeway never got finished, Caltrans would sell the houses, with existing tenants getting first dibs. For those with low or moderate incomes, Caltrans would be responsible for repairs prior to the sale. Even better for the renters, purchase prices would scale with their incomes so that mortgage payments wouldn't be a burden.

Payan is a retired DMV worker. Brown is a store-



**EL SERENO** resident Patricia Payan with her partner, Richard Enriquez, in the backyard of their home that she soon hopes is hers when escrow is closed. She has been offered a price that is far below market rate.

keeper for the city of Los Angeles. Other tenants planning to buy their homes include a retired clerk with the county fire department and a retired owner of a small upholstery store.

They said they've been quoted \$70,000, \$143,000, under \$400,000 and \$38,000, respectively, to buy their homes. Eric Menjivar, a Caltrans spokesperson, declined to confirm the numbers, saying in a response to written questions from The Times that prices aren't final until the state transportation commission approves them.

The prices are far below what residents could find on the market. Median home values in El Sereno, per Zillow, are \$792,000; the average in L.A. County is nearly \$100,000 higher. Payan said the discounted sales program gives her an opportunity to become a homeowner that she wouldn't otherwise have.

"To be able to afford it?" she said. "Oh my God, yes."

The deals discourage new owners from flipping the properties due to restrictions on resales and financial penalties that are especially stiff in the first five years. Tenants say that's no problem.

Felix Hernandez, the retired upholstery store owner, and his wife have rented on Sheffield Avenue for 48 years. Their 45-year-old son has schizophrenia and lives with them now.

"My idea was that when we passed on," said Hernandez, 78, "my son would have a place to stay."

When Hernandez and the other renters will finalize

their purchases is an open question. Tenants said major repairs have yet to begin on their properties.

Brown said the electricity in his house likely needs rewiring. The foundation, he said, is so off-kilter that he plays fetch with his dog by placing a tennis ball on the ground and watching it roll down the slope.

Menjivar said that Caltrans anticipates closing sales to tenants beginning in early 2025. He noted that if a home is deemed too expensive to fix, Caltrans is allowed to offer tenants another one, and the agency is setting aside vacant properties for that purpose.

Many in and around the area don't believe that the freeway's scar on the community will fade until the empty homes are filled. About 125 along the corridor, including those in multifamily properties, are vacant, according to Caltrans.

Affordable housing providers and agencies are buying the homes as is, and they or future homeowners will be responsible for repairs. As a sweetener, these homes cost only what Caltrans originally paid to buy them in the 1960s. Caltrans has awarded three dozen vacant properties in El Sereno to the city housing authority, San Gabriel Valley Habitat for Humanity and other nonprofits. Typical price tags for the homes range from \$14,553 to \$28,564.

Habitat workers have begun renovations on those that have closed.

Bryan Wong, the nonprofit's chief executive, said more than 1,000 people have submitted applications to

buy the homes. To qualify, families of four have to earn no more than \$10,000 annually, with a sliding income scale for households of different sizes. All must have solid credit and \$7,500 set aside for a down payment. Habitat plans to reserve half for those already living or working in El Sereno.

Wong, who is 59, grew up in South Pasadena and has been hearing about the 710 Freeway all his life. He's elated to be helping make the community whole.

"This is not a pipe dream anymore or a what-if story," Wong said. "This is done. This is happening."

In Pasadena and South Pasadena, Caltrans is offering vacant homes to the cities, which will then spin them off to third parties. South Pasadena officials had expected to gain control of some homes more than a year ago, but the sales have yet to be finalized.

"We appreciate your patience," the real estate team hired by the city said on its website. The city expects to close on the purchases this month.

The city of Pasadena has an army of building inspectors and appraisers ready to examine 17 empty homes offered by Caltrans once they're allowed inside, said Bill Huang, director of the city housing department.

Huang said the city will turn over the homes to Habitat or other nonprofits and may sell some of the larger, historic properties at market rates to finance affordable housing initiatives in the city.

"Having dozens of vacant homes isn't good for any

neighborhood," Huang said. "We're not solving the saga of all the Caltrans-owned homes, but we will for 17 of them."

Menjivar said that despite the complaints about the pace, the agency is pleased with its progress in the past year. About two dozen tenants are in escrow to buy their homes. All the vacant properties Caltrans has awarded in El Sereno have closed or are expected to do so within the next several weeks, he said. The agency anticipates its sales to Pasadena will be final early next year.

For now, Caltrans is still holding back some of the empty houses, including its most famous property.

Built around 1910, the stately, 2½-story, wood, brick and stucco Craftsman home at 1199 S. Pasadena Ave. is where Child was raised. Biographies of the chef include tales of Child sleeping outdoors on the second-floor porch and romping through the lawn with her younger siblings and their Airedale dog, Eric the Red.

On a recent Friday, longtime local preservationists Claire Bogaard and Mic Hansen admired the original, oversized wooden front door and redwood beams on the porch.

"Look at that," Hansen said. "You're not going to find these kinds of wood anymore."

Bogaard and Hansen have been behind efforts to secure official historic designations for the Child house and others in the neighborhood as examples of landmark early 20th century

Southern California architecture. They lamented the signs of disregard in a home that has remained vacant for so long.

Besides the plywood on the windows, someone had managed to get a large trampoline over the chain-link fence in the backyard and left it there.

"Some of these houses were magnificent," Hansen said. "It's sad to see them deteriorate and go unused."

Menjivar said the Child house and other remaining vacant properties in Pasadena will be offered to the city "in the near future."

Resentment over the empty houses boiled over in spring 2020. Homeless and housing-insecure residents seized a dozen of the vacant homes in El Sereno in a coordinated protest against the lack of state action to house the most needy. The activism succeeded, as Caltrans leased two dozen of its properties to the city housing authority for the protesters, who called themselves Reclaimers, and other homeless residents to pay rent and live in the homes legally for two years.

For the Reclaimers, those two years expired in late 2022, but seven households remain. The housing authority has pending eviction lawsuits against them.

Tina Booth, the L.A. housing authority's director of asset management, said that the agency continues to offer assistance and buyouts to the Reclaimers but that the terms of the agreement require them to leave.

"We are trying to encourage folks to continue to work with us so that they can land in supportive housing or other affordable units and so that they're just not simply displaced," Booth said.

More broadly, she said, her agency is expanding its commitment to low-income housing in El Sereno through the vacant properties it's buying from Caltrans. The housing authority plans to refurbish single-family homes and add accessory dwelling units so that more people can live as tenants there.

The public agency's stance frustrates Sandra Saucedo, a Reclaimer facing eviction. She said that the housing authority shouldn't be forcing out people who need housing — Saucedo sometimes sells her plasma for income — and that instead housing officials and Caltrans should allow them to remain by selling the properties to a community land trust.

Two Reclaimers who recently accepted the housing authority's \$15,000 buyout offer have returned to homelessness. Saucedo, who was living in her car before she occupied a home, fears the same fate.

"It's very scary," said Saucedo, 42. "From one day to the next, you could lose everything."

## MARKET ROUNDUP

# Data yield no surprises; stocks rise

ASSOCIATED PRESS

**NEW YORK** — U.S. stocks pulled closer to their records on Thursday after a couple of reports on the economy came in close to expectations.

The Standard & Poor's 500 rose 0.7% and climbed back within 1.3% of its record set in July after a shaky summer. It remains on track for a fourth winning week in the last five.

The Dow Jones industrial average added 0.6%, and the Nasdaq composite rose 1%.

Nvidia was the strongest force lifting the S&P 500; it rose 1.9% to bring its gain for the week to nearly 16%.

It and other major tech stocks helped offset a 12.4% slump for Moderna after the vaccine maker said it expects to break even in 2028, pushing out its earlier prediction of 2026. The company, whose sales have cratered in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis, is also reducing its 2025-28 research and development investment by 20%.

Treasury yields held relatively steady after reports on layoffs and inflation included few surprises. The data did little to change the overriding belief that the U.S. economy is slowing, along with inflation, and that the Federal Reserve will

## Major stock indexes

Index	Close	Daily change	Daily % change	YTD % change
Dow industrials	41,096.77	+235.06	+0.58	+9.04
S&P 500	5,595.76	+41.63	+0.75	+17.32
Nasdaq composite	17,569.68	+174.15	+1.00	+17.04
S&P 400	2,983.36	+23.52	+0.79	+7.26
Russell 2000	2,129.43	+25.58	+1.22	+5.05
EuroStoxx 50	4,814.08	+50.50	+1.06	+6.47
Nikkei (Japan)	36,833.27	+1,213.50	+3.41	+10.07
Hang Seng (Hong Kong)	17,240.39	+131.68	+0.77	+1.13

Associated Press

deliver a cut to interest rates next week in hopes of protecting the job market and preventing a recession.

One report said the number of U.S. workers applying for unemployment benefits last week ticked up, though it remains low relative to history. Another said prices charged at the wholesale level were 1.7% higher in August than a year before. That's a slowdown from July's inflation rate, but an underlying measure that economists see as a better predictor of future trends also ticked up more than expected.

The inflation data were similar to Wednesday's report on prices at the U.S. consumer level. That kept traders betting the Fed will deliver a traditional-size cut of a quarter of a percentage point next week, instead of the larger half-point cut that

some had earlier been expecting.

Lower interest rates help goose the economy and investment prices, but they can also fuel inflation.

In the bond market, the yield on the 10-year Treasury edged up to 3.68% from 3.66% late Wednesday. It's steadying a bit after sliding since April on expectations for coming rate cuts. That easing helped pull the average rate on a 30-year mortgage to its lowest level in 19 months, according to Freddie Mac.

Any rate cuts by the Fed would be the first in more than four years. Across the Atlantic, moves to protect the economy have already begun. The European Central Bank cut interest rates by a quarter of a percentage point on Thursday, the second time it's done so to prop

up economic growth.

Despite all the focus on how much the Fed will cut rates in September, the more important factor is how much in total the Fed will ultimately cut, and how much the market has already priced in, say strategists at UBS. Many traders are forecasting total cuts of more than 2 percentage points over the next year, according to data from CME Group.

"Any divergence from this path — whether from resurgent inflation or recessionary risks — will likely be received poorly by the market," according to the strategists led by Jonathan Golub.

On Wall Street, Kroger climbed 7.2% after reporting stronger profit for the latest quarter than analysts expected. The grocer's revenue fell short of expectations, but it raised the floor of its forecast range for a key revenue measure for the full year.

Alaska Air Group rose 1.2% after raising its forecast for profit in the summer quarter. The airline said an important underlying measure of revenue will probably be higher than a year earlier. Fuel costs are also likely to be lower than expected.

American Airlines gained 1% after its flight attendants voted to approve a labor contract and avert a possible strike.

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