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It does seem like things are getting worse. We can’t be with our families this holiday. Now this. I suppose we have to make new traditions.

— Andrea Sowers of Pleasanton

Massive fraud in jobless claims

Hundreds of millions lost in scams involving inmates

By Chase DiFeliciano and Michael Cahalan

Scammers have made off with hundreds of millions of dollars meant for unemployed Californians using the names of jail and prison inmates, according to district attorneys across the state.

A letter from a task force of district attorneys asked Gov. Gavin Newsom for his personal involvement and significant resources to fight what appears to be the most significant fraud on taxpayer funds in California history.

The letter pointed to fraud in the federal Pandemic Unemployment Assistance program, created as part of a coronavirus package in the early days of the pandemic. The program was designed for people out of work because of the pandemic who wouldn’t normally qualify for unemployment payments, such as gig workers.

Fraud continues at 404

Nonprofits join forces to feed East Oakland

By Sarah Ravani

Dozens of people lined up Tuesday morning outside the offices of East Oakland Collective, children in tow, to pick up homemade Thanksgivings. They also received bags with staples like paper towels and hand sanitizer.

The new effort assisting low-income families started as a way to help those experiencing food insecurity, economic distress and isolation during the coronavirus pandemic.

“This is a blessing,” said Mildred Buckley, a 66-year-old Oakland resident, who handed her a full meal, which Buckley said she kicked off on Tuesday at the corporate headquarters of O’Farrell and Stockton.

By Steve Rubenstein

For yet another thing loosened by the pandemic, consider the cute little kittens and puppies in the Macy’s window in downtown San Francisco.

They’ve all gone virtual — no live kittens and puppies this year, just endless loops of them. The change puts an end to a 19-season holiday tradition that took place for consecutive holiday seasons.

“Tried to be positive about this,” said Andrea Sowers of Pleasanton who, with her daughter, Lauren, watched a video clip of a brown kitten batting a red ball, then watched it twice more.

“They do seem like things are getting worse. We can’t be with our families this holiday. Now this. I suppose we have to make new traditions,” Sowers said.

“Everybody’s making videos this year,” said Lauren. “Kittens, too.”

It’s a matter of public safety, said Jennifer Scarlett, president of the San Francisco SPCA. Put a real kitten or puppy in the department store display window, as the SF SPCA has traditionally done, and a whole lot of folks will stand shoulder to shoulder, transfixed.

In 2020, such close quarters could be hazardous to your health.

“We were concerned about creating a crowd,” Scarlett said.

California pollsters earn victory laps while national forecasters take lumps

By John Wildermuth

Voters in key battleground states fueled pollsters again this presidential election, but in California they did just what the polls suggested they would.

California’s election forecasts were almost smack on the final numbers, a rare bright spot for the much-criticized industry. It hasn’t always been that way in California, which these days have built a comfortable margin in the gut-check polls — making the state much easier to predict.

By Sarah Ravani

LarryMcKinney completes his ballot at a polling place on Fillmore Street in S.F., but most Californians mailed their ballots.