Wayfinder kiosks: a first look at the functioning prototype

The first working prototype of the digital wayfinding and out-of-home advertising kiosk program has been made available for Santa Monica residents to inspect, examine and evaluate, and we went along to prod, play and put it to the test ourselves.

Officially known as the Digital Wayfinding and Out-of-Home Advertising Kiosk Program, the initiative was first introduced in early 2020, shortly before the pandemic, but the proposal was temporarily shelved until November 2022, when Council selected a company to install, operate and maintain the network of kiosks. A company called BIG Outdoor beat the competition and was awarded the exclusive franchise in December 2022. However, one of the companies spurned by the selection process, IKE Smart City, threatened legal action, accusing BIG of exaggerating their qualifications and copying other company’s intellectual property as it related to the kiosks.

However, in a classic kumbaya ending to this epic tale, both IKE and Big settled their differences in February 2023 and announced a partnership to meet the terms of the selection process. IKE Smart City, threatened legal action, accusing BIG of exaggerating their qualifications and copying other company’s intellectual property as it related to the kiosks.

Survey shows homelessness is the biggest stressor for housed LA residents

It is no surprise that the homeless crisis in L.A is taking a toll on the mental health of the unhoused. A 2022 study by the RAND Institute found that 54% reported suffering from a mental health condition and symptoms of depression, stress or anxiety.

But according to a recent LAist survey conducted between Dec. 12 and March 12, 33% of respondents who classified themselves as either homeowners or renters felt homelessness stood as “their biggest personal stressor” with 63% citing it as the top issue for...
US decides to rejoin UNESCO and pay back dues, to counter Chinese influence

ANGELA CHARLTON AND MATTHEW LEE
Associated Press

UNESCO announced Monday that the United States plans to rejoin the U.N. cultural and scientific agency — and pay more than $600 million in back dues — after a decade-long dispute sparked by the organization’s move to include Palestine as a member.

It’s a historic moment for UNESCO
- Audrey Azoulay UNESCO’s director general

U.S. officials say the decision to return was motivated by concern that China is filling the gap left by the U.S. in UNESCO policymaking, notably in setting standards for artificial intelligence and technology education around the world.

The move will face a vote by UNESCO’s member states in the coming weeks. But approval seems a formality after the resounding applause that greeted the announcement in UNESCO’s Paris headquarters Monday. Not a single country raised an objection to the return of a country that was once the agency’s single biggest funder.

The U.S. and Israel stopped financing UNESCO after it voted to include Palestine as a member state in 2011. The Trump administration decided in 2017 to withdraw from the agency altogether the following year, citing long-running anti-Israel bias and management problems.

UNESCO’s director general, Audrey Azoulay, has worked to address those concerns since her election in 2017, and that appears to have paid off.

“It’s a historic moment for UNESCO,” she said Monday. “It’s also an important day for multilateralism.”

U.S. Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources Richard Verma submitted a letter last week to Azoulay formalizing the plan to rejoin. He noted progress in depoliticizing debate about the Middle East and reforming the agency’s management, according to the hand-delivered letter, obtained by AP.

The decision is a big boost to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, known for its World Heritage program as well as projects to fight climate change and teach girls to read.

What’s happened over the last years meant that UNESCO matters
- Audrey Azoulay UNESCO’s director general

While Palestinian membership in UNESCO was the trigger for the U.S. fallout with the agency, its return is more about China’s growing influence.

Undersecretary of State for Management John Bass said in March that the U.S. absence from UNESCO had strengthened China, and “undercuts our ability to be as effective in promoting our vision of a free world.”

He said UNESCO was key in setting and shaping standards for technology and science teaching around the world, “so if we’re really serious about the digital-age competition with China … we can’t afford to be absent any longer.”

The U.S. decision doesn’t address the status of Palestine. While it’s a member of UNESCO, on the ground, the Palestinians are further away from independence than ever. There have not been serious peace talks in over a decade, and Israel’s new government is filled with hardliners who oppose Palestinian independence.

The Palestinian ambassador to UNESCO didn’t comment on the U.S. decision. The only envoy who wasn’t gushing with praise was China’s ambassador, Jin Yang. He noted the negative impact of the U.S. absence, and expressed hope that the move means Washington is serious about multilateralism.

“Being a member of an international organization is a serious issue, and we hope that the return of the U.S. this time means it acknowledges the mission and the goals of the organization,” the ambassador said.

UNESCO director Azoulay, who is...
The Great Grift: How billions in COVID-19 relief aid was stolen or wasted

RICHARD LARDNER, JENNIFER MCDERMOTT AND AARON KESSLER
Associated Press

Much of the theft was brazen, even simple. Fraudsters used the Social Security numbers of dead people and federal prisoners to get unemployment checks. Cheaters collected those benefits in multiple states. And federal loan applicants weren’t cross-checked against a Treasury Department database that would have raised red flags about sketchy borrowers.

Criminals and gangs grabbed the money. But so did a U.S. soldier in Georgia, the pastors of a defunct church in Texas, a former state lawmaker in Missouri and a roofing contractor in Montana.

All of it led to the greatest grift in U.S. history, with thieves plundering billions of dollars in federal COVID-19 relief aid intended to combat the worst pandemic in a century and to stabilize an economy in free fall.

An Associated Press analysis found that fraudsters potentially stole more than $280 billion in COVID-19 relief funding; another $123 billion was wasted or mispent. Combined, the loss represents 10% of the $4.2 trillion the U.S. government has so far disbursed in COVID relief aid.

That number is certain to grow as investigators dig deeper into thousands of potential schemes.

“Here was this sort of endless pot of money that anyone could access,” said Dan Fruchter, chief of the fraud and white-collar crime unit at the U.S. Attorney’s office in the Eastern District of Washington.

“How could so much be stolen? Investigators and outside experts say the government, in seeking to quickly spend trillions in relief aid, conducted too little oversight during the pandemic’s early stages and instituted too few restrictions on applicants. In short, they say, the grift was just way too easy.”

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“Here was this sort of endless pot of money that anyone could access,” said Dan Fruchter, chief of the fraud and white-collar crime unit at the U.S. Attorney’s office in the Eastern District of Washington. “Folks kind of fooled themselves into thinking that it was a socially acceptable thing to do, even though it wasn’t legal.”

The U.S. government has charged more than 2,230 defendants with pandemic-related fraud crimes and is conducting thousands of investigations.

Most of the looted money was swiped from three large pandemic-relief initiatives launched during the Trump administration and inherited by President Joe Biden. Those programs were designed to help small businesses and unemployed workers survive the economic upheaval caused by the pandemic.

The pillaging was wide but not always as deep as the eye-catching headlines about cases of millions or dollars. But all of the theft, big and small, illustrates an epidemic of scams and swindles at a time America was grappling with overrun hospitals, school closures and shuttered businesses. Since the pandemic began in early 2020, more than 1.13 million people in the U.S. have died from COVID-19, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Michael Horowitz, the U.S. Justice Department inspector general who chairs the federal Pandemic Response Accountability Committee, told Congress the fraud is “clearly in the tens of billions of dollars” and may eventually exceed $100 billion.

Horowitz told the AP he was sticking with that estimate, but won’t be confident about the number until he gets more solid data.

“It’s hesitant to get too far out on how much it is,” he said. “But clearly it’s substantial and the final accounting is still at least a couple of years away.”

Mike Galdo, the U.S. Justice Department’s acting director for COVID-19 Fraud Enforcement, said, “It is an unprecedented amount of fraud.”

Before leaving office, former President Donald Trump approved emergency aid measures totaling $3.2 trillion, according to figures from the Pandemic Response Accountability Committee. Biden’s 2021 American Rescue Plan authorized the spending of another $1.9 trillion. About a fifth of the $5.2 trillion has yet to be paid out, according to the committee’s most recent accounting.

Never has so much federal emergency aid been injected into the U.S. economy so quickly. “The largest rescue package in American history,” U.S. Comptroller General Gene Dodaro told Congress.

The enormous scale of that package has obscured multibillion-dollar mistakes. An $837 billion IRS program, for example, succeeded 99% of the time in getting economic stimulus checks to the proper taxpayers, according to the tax agency. Nevertheless, that 1% failure rate translated into nearly $8 billion going to “ineligible individuals,” a Treasury Department inspector general told AP.

An IRS spokesman said the agency does not agree with all the figures cited by the watchdog and noted that, even if correct, the losses represented a tiny fraction of the program’s budget.

The health crisis thrust the Small Business Administration, an agency that typically gets little attention, into an unprecedented role. In less than a few days, a week at most, the SBA had doled out $67 billion in disaster loans.

When the pandemic struck, the agency was assigned to manage two massive relief efforts: the COVID-19 Economic Injury Disaster Loan and Paycheck Protection programs, which would swell to more than a trillion dollars. SBA’s workforce had to get money out the door, fast, to help struggling businesses and their employees. COVID-19 pushed SBAs pace from a walk to an Olympic sprint.

Between March 2020 and the end of July 2020, the agency granted 3.2 million COVID-19 economic injury disaster loans totaling $169 billion, according to an SBA inspector general report, while at the same time implementing the huge new Paycheck Protection Program.

In the haste, guardrails to protect federal money were dropped. Prospective borrowers were allowed to “self-certify” that their loan applications were true. The CARES Act also barred SBA from looking at tax return transcripts that could have weeded out shady or undeserving applicants, a decision eventually reversed at the end of 2020.

“If you open up the bank window and say, give me your application and just promise me you really are who you say you are, you attract a lot of fraudsters and that’s what happened here,” Horowitz said.

The SBA inspector general’s office has estimated fraud in the COVID-19 economic injury disaster loan program at $86 billion and the Paycheck Protection program at $20 billion. The watchdog is expected in coming weeks to release revised loss figures that are likely to be much higher.

In an interview, SBA Inspector General Hannibal “Mike” Ware declined to say what the new fraud estimate for both programs will be.

“It will be a figure that is fair, that is 1,000% defensible by my office, fully backed by our significant criminal investigative activity that is taking place in this space,” Ware said.

Ware and his staff are overwhelmed with pandemic-related audits and investigations. The office has a backlog of more than 80,000 actionable leads, close to a 100 years’ worth of work.

“Death by a thousand cuts might be death by 80,000 cuts for them,” Horowitz said of Ware’s workload. “It’s just the magnitude of it, the enormity of it.”

A 2022 study from the University of Texas at Austin found almost five times as many suspicious Paycheck Protection loans as the $20 billion SBA’s inspector general has reported so far. The research, led by finance professor John Griffin, found as much as $117 billion could be in questionable and possibly fraudulent loans, citing indicators such as non-registered businesses and multiple loans to the same address.

Horowitz, the pandemic watchdog chairman, criticized the government’s failure early on to use the “Do Not Pay” Treasury Department database, designed to keep government money from going to debarred contractors, fugitives, felons or people convicted of tax fraud.

Those reviews, he said, could have been done quickly.

“It’s a false narrative that has been set out, that there are only two choices,” Horowitz said. “One choice is, get the money out right away. And that the only other choice was to spend weeks and months trying to figure out who was entitled to it.”

In less than a few days, a week at most, Horowitz said, SBA might have discovered thousands of ineligible applicants.

“24 hours? 48 hours? Would that really have

Death by a thousand cuts might be death by 80,000 cuts for them

- Michael Horowitz, the U.S. Justice Department
Jeffrey Epstein victims settle sex trafficking lawsuit against JPMorgan for $290 million

KEN SWEET AND MICHELLE CHAPMAN
AP Business Writers

JPMorgan Chase announced a tentative $290 million settlement Monday with the victims of Jeffrey Epstein who had accused the bank of being the financial conduit that allowed the financier to continue operating a sex trafficking operation.

Epstein was arrested in 2019 on federal charges accusing him of paying underage girls for massages and then molesting them at his homes in Florida and New York. He was found dead in jail in August of that year, at age 66. A medical examiner ruled his death a suicide.

The lawsuit filed in Manhattan federal court in November sought to hold JPMorgan financially liable for Epstein’s decades-long abuse of teenage girls and young women. A related lawsuit has been filed in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

The proposed settlement comes roughly two weeks after JPMorgan Chase CEO Jamie Dimon testified in a deposition for the case, where he denied knowing about Epstein and his crimes until the financier was arrested in 2019, according to a transcript of the videotaped deposition released last month.

“We all now understand that Epstein’s behavior was monstrous, and we believe this settlement is in the best interest of all parties, especially the survivors, who suffered unimaginable abuse at the hands of this man,” JPMorgan Chase said in a written statement early Monday.

The proposed settlement, which must still be approved by the judge in the case, totals $290 million, according to lead plaintiff attorney David Boies.

According to the lawsuits, JPMorgan provided Epstein loans and regularly allowed him to withdraw large sums of cash from 1998 through August 2013 even though it was aware of his participation in sex trafficking. The anonymous victim in the suit, referred to as Jane Doe, said she was sexually abused by Epstein from 2006 and 2013.

Also on Monday, a judge ruled in favor of making Doe’s lawsuit into a class-action lawsuit for all victims of Epstein's sex crimes.

“Money, which for far too long flowed with impunity between Jeffrey Epstein’s global sex trafficking enterprise and Wall Street’s leading banks, is decisively being used for good,” Sigrid McCawley, a senior vice president at JPMorgan Chase, said in a prepared statement.

The bank continued to count Epstein as a client despite the fact that he was arrested and pleaded guilty in 2008 to sex crimes in Florida.

“Any association with him was a mistake and we regret it,” the bank said in a prepared statement. “We would never have continued to do business with him if we believed he was using our bank in any way to help commit heinous crimes.”

Both lawsuits were filed after New York state in November enacted a temporary law letting adult victims of sexual abuse to sue others for the abuse they suffered, even if the abuse occurred long ago. Lawsuits are still pending between the U.S. Virgin Islands and JPMorgan Chase, and the bank is still pursuing its lawsuit against JPMorgan former executive Les Staley.

The bank has denied the allegations and sued Staley, saying he hid Epstein’s crimes to keep him as a client. Staley left JPMorgan in 2013 to later become CEO of the British bank Barclays. Staley stepped down from that role in 2021 due to his prior relationship with Epstein.

AP Writer Michael Hill contributed to this report from Albany. AP Writer Larry Neumeister contributed from New York.

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GUEST COMMENTARY

Send comments to editor@smdp.com

California’s COVID unemployment reckoning goes national

LAUREN HEPLER
Special to the Daily Press

A former federal technology official enlisted by Gov. Gavin Newsom to triage California’s pandemic unemployment response details in a new book how technical and political failures combined to block payments to workers while enabling fraud.

Jennifer Pahlka, founder of Code For America and former U.S. deputy chief technology officer, writes that the turmoil at California’s Employment Development Department is a prime example of failures that have also plagued other major civic tech efforts, such as the post-Obamacare implosion of healthcare.gov or archaic IT systems at the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs.

"Of all the tech disasters I’ve witnessed and tried to help untangle, the one I’ve come to see as most emblematic of these forces — and the ways we consistently misunderstand them — is the story of California’s unemployment insurance in the first year of the pandemic," Pahlka writes in the book “Recoding America: Why Government is Failing In the Digital Age and How We Can Do Better.”

Three chapters of the book chronicle Pahlka’s time co-leading a “Strike Team” deployed by Newsom in mid-2020, as long benefit delays and outlandish stories of fraud began to dominate headlines. In the months to follow, state officials would find that payments were delayed to some 5 million workers and may have been improperly denied for another 1 million, all while the state lost as much as $32 billion to fraud, according to varied state and industry estimates.

Among the problems and potential solutions detailed in the new book: Why it was easier for scammers to file successful unemployment applications than it was for some workers, how a $100 million-plus tech modernization project by state contractor Deloitte buckled during the pandemic, and why the furor about outdated online systems has more to do with flawed state and federal policy than old software.

"Modernizing technology without rationalizing and simplifying the policy and process it must support seldom works," Pahlka wrote. “Mostly, it results in much the same mess you had before, only now in the cloud.”

An EDD spokesperson declined to comment.

The new details come amid a national reckoning over pandemic unemployment failures, including millions in federal funding recently made available for new tech modernization efforts. More than 150,000 workers in the state are still facing long appeals backlogs as they fight for delayed or denied unemployment benefits.

Meanwhile, congressional factions have also dragged jobless benefits back into bitter political fights. Last week, questions about responsibility for EDD woes resurfaced during a contentious U.S. House committee hearing led

SEE UNEMPLOYMENT PAGE 8

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Crime Watch

Crime Watch is culled from reports provided by the Santa Monica Police Department. These are arrests only. All parties are innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.

At 7:03 A.M. On June 9

SMPD received a 9-1-1 call from the resident in an apartment in the 800 block of 18th Street. The caller reported hearing someone walking around upstairs in their two-story unit. The two residents left the location. Officers were on-scene and set up a perimeter within minutes. They conducted an interior search, noting that two vehicles in the attached garage had been rifled through. Inside the house, a package had been torn open and clothing and other items had been pulled from drawers and a storage closet and left on the floor. Officers discovered a single male subject hiding in a small closet. Vanbasten Portillo, 32 years old, with an address in Los Angeles was arrested for burglary and taken to the Santa Monica jail for booking.

DUI

From Page 1

However, the community is rallying around the Velazquez Ortiz family.

“He lost his left leg completely, and his right leg is still under observation with a big risk that he might lose it as well,” said a fundraiser organized for the family. According to the fundraiser, Gelvy is the youngest of three siblings who are orphans; he (along with his siblings) came to the United States from Guatemala, in hopes of finding a better life with opportunities. He was a full time high school student, while his brothers worked to support the family.

Homeless

From Page 1

Mayor Karen Bass to prioritize.

“People are especially vulnerable to anxiety right now for a multitude of reasons both personal and global - job insecurity, increased cost of living, political instability, global climate change,” McManus said. “Having so many reasons to be anxious already makes it even harder to have the resources to manage anxiety around perceived threats to personal safety.”

Los Angeles Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW), Ekta Aggarwal, who is the founder and CEO of Shakti Therapy and Healing Services said she found it “encouraging” that the community were able to recognize homelessness as a public safety issue that Mayor Bass needs to rectify as she too has seen an uptick of clients impacted by the growing concern.

“Homelessness takes a significant toll on the mental health and well-being of children and adults, creating a sense of instability, unwavering fear, and vulnerability, even those not directly impacted by a loss of shelter,” Aggarwal said. McManus noted that with the overload of issues people are facing on a daily basis it is even more important that the solutions created to tackle homelessness are not just temporary fixes.

“People need local leadership to reassure them that there is a plan to take measures that will keep them safe,” McManus said.

People need local leadership to reassure them that there is a plan to take measures that will keep them safe

-Amy McManus

Aggarwal added that people are having to deal with moving from a pandemic right into a homeless epidemic that is increasing by an inordinate number of people in the past five years. She explained to the Current that the attempt of those in desperate need to meet basic needs can lead to violent situations and cause fear in the community that can lead to everyday citizens experiencing trauma symptoms such as “heightened anxiety and hyper-vigilance.”

“These issues often compound one another, leading to increased generalized anxiety, paranoia, fear, isolation, and instability among those affected,” Aggarwal said, also adding “It is imperative for policymakers and mental health clinicians to find alignment and collaborate on holistic health and wellness approaches that directly address these challenges collectively to address the root causes of distress and homelessness.”

Published in partnership with the Westside Current
WAYFINDER KIOSKS
FROM PAGE 1

the contract that will roll out up to 50 digital wayfinding signs and raise in the region of $5 million per year for the city.

An open house was set up at the Bergamot Station Arts Center and three dates were made available in the first week of June. The public was invited to explore the digital features, interact with the user interface, offer design criticisms and even suggestions on a giant map as to where the best locations would be to place them throughout the city.

Keen to get our paws on this gigantic, new gadget, we jumped at the opportunity to visit as soon as possible and during our visit, a number of Santa Monica residents trickled in, including Councilmember Christine Parra. Almost tragically the first topic of discussion was how well this monolith-sized message board would stand up to the inevitable vandalism that any nice, shiny new toy placed on the streets of Santa Monica will be vulnerable to.

“First and foremost was making sure we had protocols in place if something does happen,” says Bill Tagliaferri, President of BIG Outdoors. “We’re hiring full time maintenance workers and their job is solely to check these kiosks and clean them. And this is in tandem with the city’s maintenance program. So they’re going to be in charge of fixing whatever issues that are sorted within 48 hours.”

BIG has a number of digital displays in place in cities around the country and while none of them are quite like the wayfinder kiosk, some do share some very basic functionality in their features.

Steve Edgington, Lead Engineer at BIG Outdoors, says that they’re not only designed to withstand strict seismic standards, but, lightening quick to take note. While one or two examples of iconography could be tweaked, the navigation was simple, effective and logically laid out. A wealth of useful information is available, from the nearest bars and restaurants – including ratings and reviews – to maps of the immediate area, public transportation guides, lists of local events taking place, in short, just about everything both residents and tourists alike will find extremely useful.

“This is so exciting,” Parra said, adding, “These kiosks represent new, modern and really interesting ways in which we’ll be able to share important and fun information with the whole community,” before taking a thoroughly amusing selfie.

The prototype was approximately 8ft tall, with a 55-inch display and stood in a Kubrick-esque manner in the center of the room. Despite the exterior casing not being exactly like the proposed final design – this first round of testing was more about the user interface than anything else – an emergency panic button had been incorporated as the current plan is to include something similar on the mass production model.

It currently sits about 3ft up on one edge in an attempt to make it easily accessible to someone in a wheelchair for example and to be ADA compliant. However, it also currently has no safeguards in place and any bored adolescent will almost certainly take pleasure in pretending this is a giant pinball machine once they’ve discovered that magical, mysterious silver button.

Both Ike and BIG have been working closely with Santa Monica emergency services representatives to create design solutions and SMPD Chief Ramon Batista himself took time to look over the prototype in person last week.

“It’ll be interesting to see what we can come up with. We just have to find the best engineering solution, we have some experience with blue phones and, depending on where they are, some have taken a beating but others have been used quite a bit,” Batista says, adding, “Off the top of my head I’m not sure yet how we’re going to make it essentially child proof.”

The current proposal for the kiosk design also incorporates its own Wi-Fi hotspot, with a range of about 30ft or so, plus a built-in camera that enables you to take selfies. These two features have also raised questions, the first being whether or not a free Wi-Fi network will simply result in “camps” of people huddled around the kiosks using the internet all day and the issue of privacy if cameras are incorporated.

“So long as we can clearly show with no doubt that cameras are being used responsibly we can make sure that the public feels safe in how we’re utilizing the technology,” Batista says. “It’s my hope that the cameras stay as I think it would be a win for both public safety and for having fun.”

Tagliaferri said that everyone involved was working closely with the city of Santa Monica to decide as a collective what the best policy will be. “There have been some discussions where the Wi-Fi connection ends after 30 minutes, so you’re kicked off for the day, or something along those lines,” adding, “When it comes to us making those final adjustments, we’ll be able to put in every one of those restrictions, if they’re needed.”

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**UNEMPLOYMENT**

FROM PAGE 5

by Republican lawmakers opposed to President Biden’s nomination of ex-California labor chief Julie Su to be the U.S. Labor Secretary.

Nearly three hours into the hearing convened by the House Committee on Education and the Workforce, Rep. Kevin Kiley, a Rocklin Republican, brought out a poster board printed with state auditor findings about how the “EDD did not bolster its fraud detection efforts.” The hearing followed a committee of business-versus-labor campaigning on the nomination of Su, whose role as secretary of the California Labor and Workforce Development Agency placed her at the helm of the state agency that oversaw the EDD during the pandemic.

“Do you accept any responsibility for the $32 billion in unemployment fraud that occurred on your watch in California?” Kiley asked at the hearing last week.

In a statement, an SBA spokesperson responded: “I certainly know that I and many of my colleagues, and others that sat in the same position that I did when the pandemic hit, wish that we had a system that was capable of meeting the demand.”

What exactly derailed the EDD’s computer system — or “grab bag of somewhat connected, somewhat separate systems,” as Pahlka wrote in the new book—is far more complicated than popular notions that “EDD staff was just incompetent at technology.” Even understanding the agency’s layers of antiquated technology, which she likens to “a Rochester dig, doesn’t get to the heart of the issue.

Rather, Pahlka explains, the dysfunction stems from the policy environment at the EDD and the bodies that oversee it. The California Legislature, federal labor regulators and flawed oversight mechanisms have all contributed, she says, to ever-growing and often-incompatible regulations, plus a political reality that rewards compliance over public access.

“The bureaucratic confusion,” Pahlka wrote, “ultimately lands on the people.”

Early in the pandemic, this dynamic played out in tandem with an unprecedented wave of online fraud targeting nationwide unemployment systems. California was a particularly big target, fraud analysts say, because of the state’s large size and online systems that proved easy to game.

Much of the fraud can be traced back to organized criminal rings that used stolen identity data to file fake unemployment claims in bulk — an approach, Pahlka wrote in the new book, that makes federal authorities more likely to focus on auto-fill successful applications with precise stolen data than for some real workers who made minor mistakes, like typos or listing a middle initial instead of a full middle name. They’re busy, too, with crimes unrelated to unemployment fraud. But on politically divided Capitol Hill, lawmakers have not put the pandemic behind them and are engaged in a fierce debate over the success of the relief spending and who’s to blame for the theft.

Too much government money, Republicans argue, breeds fraud, waste and inflation. Democrats have countered that all the financial muscle from Washington saved lives, businesses and jobs.

Republican and Democratic lawmakers did, however, find common ground last year on bills to give the federal government more time to catch fraudsters. Biden in August signed legislation to increase the statute of limitations from five to 10 years on crimes involving the two major programs managed by the SBA.

The extra time will help federal prosecutors untangle pandemic fraud cases, which often involve identity theft and crooks overseas. But it may also, say experts, give law enforcement efforts to go after pandemic fraudsters.

“The coronavirus pandemic plunged the U.S. economy into a short but devastating recession. Jobless rates soared into double digits and Washington sent hundreds of billions of dollars to states to help the suddenly unemployed,” the book’s opening sentence reads.

“Fraud in pandemic unemployment assistance programs stands at $76 billion, according to congressional testimony from Labor Department Inspector General Larry Turner. That’s a conservative estimate. Another $115 billion mistakenly went to people who should not have received the benefits, according to his testimony.”

**THEFT**

FROM PAGE 3

I am much more likely to get my own Social Security number wrong than a sophisticated criminal enterprise is.

-President Donald Trump for failing to act on nationwide fraud.

“With support a robust and coordinated national response to the sophisticated criminal enterprises that have threatened the integrity of unemployment programs nationwide,” the agency wrote in a letter. “Unfortunately, the Trump Administration expressed no interest in establishing such coordinated national response when these programs were initiated in 2020, leaving states to fend for themselves.”

Some of the problems cited by Pahlka and state watchdogs have since been addressed, at least in part. The federal Pandemic Unemployment Program that was the biggest target for fraud has since ended. The EDD also went on a tech buying spree during the pandemic for services including call center support from longtime contractor Deloitte and an online identity verification system recommended by Pahlka’s Strike Team (which, in turn, spurred different complaints about long waits for some workers). The agency is now working on another nascent tech modernization project called EDDNext.

Still, Pahlka warns, the biggest underlying issues remain harder to address.

“What we need has less to do with updating rigid 1950s code than with recognizing crimes of the 1970s and 1980s,” she wrote. “We need a fundamentally different way of delivering on the promise of policy.”

This article was originally published by CalMatters.

**SEND YOUR NEWS TO THE EDITOR**

Santa Monica Daily Press

tuesday@smdp.com

McGerrity reported from Providence, Rhode Island.
TODAY’S BIRTHDAY (June 13)

ARIES (March 21-April 19). You’ll stretch your understanding to get to know someone — an opportunity you’ll be happy to have. Your sophistication of mind allows you to tolerate differences and respect people’s right to live in the way that works for them.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20). A collective emphasizes the best and the worst qualities its constituents have in common. Because groups have greater power than the sum of their parts, you’ll be extremely careful who you join. The right group can bring magic to your life.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21). A problem will be yours to solve. Avoid an overly linear approach. Lightbulbs were not developed from candles. Think broadly across many subjects and disciplines. Be open-minded about the accidents and anomalies.

CANCER (June 22-July 22). Good relationships make everything else fall into place. You’ll knock yourself out for people you care for — not easy, but not caring would be harder for you. Invite someone to join your quest and you’ll make a memory.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22). A person’s behavior at any given moment is usually their best attempt to get their needs met with the tools, knowledge and abilities they have. Behavioral change comes from the acquisition of skill.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22). “Many words lead to exhaustion,” said Lao Tzu. You’ll try and communicate in fewer words, or better yet, none. Action can say it all — and in some cases, inaction can be just as expressive.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22). You allot people a certain amount of your time and there are those who continually stretch it — a signal that they wish to be more important to you. Are you flattered? How should people earn a place of priority in your life?

SCORPIO (Oct. 24-Nov. 21). You’ll be made aware of a need in your community you can help with. You don’t always feel precisely how you are connected to the whole, but your action will have a ripple effect that extends beyond what you realize.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21). You’ve spent plenty of time in the music of your own thoughts, and now it’s time to expand your range. You’ll get the opportunity to engage with the playlists of other minds and discover new music.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19). You’re a partner, a team player and an appropriate contributor. You’re also an individual who wants to be heard. With a group that’s a good fit, you can express yourself and still promote the collective agenda, no problem.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18). No matter how much a thing costs, owning it costs more because the price of ownership is always some amount of freedom. Today, you’ll work toward a lifestyle that includes fewer obligations and possessions.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20). Seeking approval from oneself instead of others takes time and practice and is so worth the effort. Reflect and identify areas where you may be seeking validation from others. Understanding your motivations is the start of a healthy change.

It’s your year for finding people who really get you. You’ll fix specific pains and receive the loyalty and patronage of devotees. Your understanding of the world is ever-expanding, and you’ll achieve heights beyond your former teachers. More highlights: Inspiration from strange places will lead you to create an amazement. Cancer and Aries adore you. Your lucky numbers are: 8, 40, 21, 3 and 6.

Sudoku

Fill in the blank cells using numbers 1 to 9. Each number can appear only once in each row, column, and 3x3 block. Use logic and process of elimination to solve the puzzle.

Solutions to Yesterday’s Sudoku

Solutions to Yesterday’s Crossword

PUZZLES

TUESDAY, JUNE 13, 2023

SOLUTIONS TO YESTERDAY’S CROSSWORD

SPAR UFO ABODE NORSE NEW DEVIL BLOAT TRAN DRESS COMPUTERSCIENCE ROE ANT JOURNALISM GROC SCAT ENSUED VIES UMA STAGE HOP HERON TAG SUEER TOEING SED PSYCHOLOGY ADO ART CRIMINAL JUSTICE RINSE RIO FACIES OCTET ILL OPENS POOLS DYE REST

Newsday Crossword

ACROSS
1. Formation on icy windows
6. Leather strap for trousers
10. Not very many
14. “Bald” national bird
15. Region
16. Prant and
17. Refreshing April precipitation
19. Lost traction on a road
20. Boys in a blended family
21. Turnpike charges
22. Veggies in a pod
23. Former French money
25. Most lately published
28. Banana covering
29. Rock from a mine
32. At the center of
33. “It’s the truth!”
34. Baseball great Gehrig
35. Is able to
36. Four-year-per theme of the puzzle
38. “... that ___ flag was still there”
39. Successful film or play
40. Already in use
41. Approximately
42. Spanish cheer
43. Located atop
44. Contacts placed
46. Wandered around
48. Voice quality
49. Punctual, as for a script
51. Region including China and Japan
55. Chimney dirt

FIVE QUARTERS

1. Produce
8. Luau necklace
2. Light brown
3. Fire-setting crime
4. Attractions of October foliage tours
5. Wicked
6. Gets married
11. “Billy” farm animal
17. Stories that might be “tall”
23. Serious criminal
24. Harness strap
25. Taco chip
26. Electronic message
27. Outerwear for January
28. Tough riddle
30. Shake out of sleep
31. Coins in Spain or Italy

DOWN
46. 7 Historical periods
5. Lost one’s footing
6. Past and present, for verbs
7. Buildings for farm animals
28. “It’s my turn”
34. Chimps and baboons
35. The Mediterranean or Caribbean
36. Caterer’s coffeemaker

MORE OF STAN’S CROSSWORDS! Play FREE from Stan’s archives of Easy, Hard and Sunday puzzles at: tinyurl.com/stan-newman-crosswords

CREATORS SYNDICATE © 2023 STANLEY NEWMAN STANXWORDS@AOL.COM 6/13/23
FIND THE WORDS

This is a theme puzzle with the subject stated below. Find the listed words in the grid. (They may run in any direction but always in a straight line. Some letters are used more than once.) Ring each word as you find it and when you have completed the puzzle, there will be 17 letters left over. They spell out the alternative theme of the puzzle.

**Fashion show**

```
M A R I E C L A I R E P O U T
M U S I C H Y T U A E B F W O
A P N S H I F O L D D R A F T
E L W K E C L F K R I K C S O
S E O I E L I O A E R E E U P
K A G R R N L G O D T T N C S
L T R T I U S M I W S I O C T
I N T E R N A T I O N A L E E
S H L A M E I W H I T E A S R
S U E D E A B B M C M G T S E
A W B O D I C E U A A A E N B
B T A N O R A K K S C T S I H
A W G A L I N E N K K S T P A
M Y S T I Q U E E L B M I H T
P O S E X P E N S I V E L K S
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Anorak  Expensive  Music  Success  Suede
Audience  Face  Mystique  Swimsuit  Suede
Bags  Fads  Pins  Tack  Swimsuit
Beauty  Fold  Pleat  Thimble  Tack
Belt  Gowns  Pose  Tops  Thimble
Beret  Hats  Pout  Wear  Tops
Bias  International  Saba  White  Wear
Bodice  Ksubi  Seam  White  Wool
Camera  Latest  Sell  Wool  Yoke
Cheer  Linen  Silk  Yoke  Yoke
Chic  Makeup  Skirt  Yoke  Yoke
Coat  Marie Claire  Stage  Yoke  Yoke
Draft  Mini  Stride  Yoke  Yoke

SOLUTIONS TO YESTERDAY’S WORDS PUZZLE.
The mighty Murray River
What's Up
out and about in Santa Monica

TUESDAY | JUNE 13

93RD COMMENCEMENT CEREMONY
Join SMC for a momentous occasion as they celebrate the achievements of over 5,000 graduating students! The traditional Commencement ceremony will be on-ground once again. Commencement Speaker: Christopher P. Lu, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations for Management and Reform. Eligible graduating students will receive RSVP details. Families/Guests: RSVPs are not required.

TUESDAY POOR TO FAIR

SURF:
Knee to thigh
Smaller mix of 5 swell and NW swell. Morning winds look light. High tide slows the dawn patrol for most of the region, shapes improving as the tide comes down by mid morning.

WEDNESDAY | JUNE 14

TRIVIA NIGHT AT THE BUNGALOW
Meet at The Bungalow at Fairmont Miramar Hotel & Bungalows every Wednesday for Trivia Night. Test your knowledge, enjoy the food and fare and win over $500 worth of prizes every week. Bring friends and family for an epic showdown. See you there! The Bungalow 101 Wilshire Blvd Santa Monica, CA 90401 https://thebungalow.com/santa-monica/Calendar

CHILDREN’S BUREAU OFFERING VIRTUAL ORIENTATIONS
Children’s Bureau is seeking foster families and now offers two virtual ways for individuals and/or couples to learn how to help children in foster care while reuniting with birth families or how to provide legal permanency by adoption. If you or someone you know may be interested in learning more about foster care and adoption, a live English Zoom Orientation is scheduled for June 15 from 4 to 5 p.m. hosted by a Children’s Bureau team member and a foster parent. For those who want to learn at their own pace about becoming a foster and/or adopt parent, a PowerPoint orientation is also available. To RSVP for the live orientation or to request the PowerPoint orientation, please email RFruitment@all4kids.org or call 800-730-3933, or visit https://www.all4kids.org/foster-care-and-adoption-inquiry-form/ to complete a quick inquiry form. A link to the meeting will be emailed to you.

THURSDAY | JUNE 15

JUNIORS GRADUATION CONCERT
The annual Senior High Concert is a hallmark event that celebrates the academic and artistic achievements of our graduating students. This year, the event will be streaming live at 7 p.m. on Thursday, June 15, 2023. The concert will feature a variety of performances, including orchestra, choir, and instrumental ensembles, showcasing the talent and dedication of our graduating seniors. For more information or to RSVP, please visit https://www.smc.edu/events/juniors-graduation-concert

SATURDAY | JUNE 17

SUMMER SOLSTICE CELEBRATION
Ishihara Park Learning Garden, 2909 Exposition Blvd, Santa Monica 90404. Join us at the Ishihara Park Learning Garden as we celebrate the impending Summer Solstice by focusing our energy on the sun! It by building a SOLAR OVEN. What is a Solar Oven you may ask? Come and find out.

CARDBOARD YACHT REGATTA
Have you ever dreamed of setting sail across the waters in your very own yacht? Now you can build your own cardboard yacht and test its seaworthiness in a race across the Beach House Pool. Build a yacht using just corrugated cardboard and duct tape, decorate it, cross your fingers and hope you can make it to the other side! $20 to participate. Register online at https://lanc.apm.activecommunities.com/santamonicarecreation.9 a.m. - 1 p.m.

UC MASTER GARDENERS AT PICO FARMERS MARKET
Visit with the UC Master Gardeners at the Saturday Pico Farmers Market. He booth is filled with free advice on how to care for plants, how to troubleshoot a gardening problem, and much more. Free seeds and seedlings are available on a limited basis. Market attendance is subject to change based on weather and holidays. 10 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.

NOTHIN’ BUT SAND BEACH CLEANUP
Join Heal the Bay for our June Nothin’ But Sand Beach Cleanup. 10 a.m. - 12 p.m. Register online at https://healthebay.org/event/nothin-but-sand-beach-cleanup-6/

31ST ANNUAL JUNETEETH CELEBRATION
Join the City of Santa Monica and the Juneteenth Celebration Committee, Inc. for an afternoon of music, unique food and craft vendors, and local resources to celebrate the 31st annual Juneteenth on Saturday, June 17th, from 1 to 7 pm in Virginia Avenue Park under the theme of Coming Together in Appreciation, Reconciliation, and Commemoration! Virginia Avenue Park, 2200 Virginia Ave. 1 - 7 p.m.

CHESS SUNDAYS
Make your move! Chess players of all ages and levels are invited for weekly casual play on Third Street Promenade! Every Sunday through the summer, from 11am-3pm, play a game with a friend or meet a new one. Chess sets (including a few giant ones) will be provided, but you’re welcome to bring your own! This event is a partnership between the Santa Monica Chess Club and Downtown Santa Monica, Inc.

SUNDAY | JUNE 18

CHESS SUNDAYS
Make your move! Chess players of all ages and levels are invited for weekly casual play on Third Street Promenade! Every Sunday through the summer, from 11am-3pm, play a game with a friend or meet a new one. Chess sets (including a few giant ones) will be provided, but you’re welcome to bring your own! This event is a partnership between the Santa Monica Chess Club and Downtown Santa Monica, Inc.

WEATHER
Tuesday: Partly sunny, with a high near 66. Light southwest wind becoming west southwest 10 to 15 mph. Tuesday Night: Patchy fog after 11pm. Otherwise, increasing clouds, with a low around 58. Wednesday: Mostly cloudy, with a high near 66. West southwest wind 5 to 10 mph. Wednesday Night: Patchy fog after 11pm. Otherwise, mostly cloudy, with a low around 60.

DAILY LOTTERY

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