

Do-nothing session

Connecticut legislators left much work undone

Danbury News-Times Editorial

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Connecticut legislators ended their 2008 session last week and are already planning a special session to do what they failed to do in the regular session.

Sometimes special sessions are needed, but this one would not have been needed if legislators had done their jobs in the first place.

Instead, they left important issues -- such as the state budget -- until the last minute and ran out of time.

Indeed, they didn't even adopt a state budget. They couldn't decide what to do so they left in place a two-year budget adopted last year in different financial times -- happily labeling this policy failure a "do nothing" approach to public business.

That old budget holds much hurt for local municipalities, local nursing homes and Ability Beyond Disability, which runs local group homes for people with disabilities.

That old budget also includes a cut in school funding for an innovative state program to help poor readers. For Danbury, that will mean a \$900,000 loss.

Oh, well. That old budget will now be the new budget, effective July 1, if wiser heads don't prevail.

And don't expect wisdom to park itself in Hartford anytime soon.

The state House actually spent 4 1/2 hours last week debating whether the state should prohibit open containers of alcohol in vehicles.

There were concerns that the container bill might give police an excuse for racial profiling. There were concerns that the container bill would interfere with the right of adult sports fans to drink while being driven home from a game.

There was limited concern about safety, so Connecticut remains one of seven states that allows open containers of alcohol in a vehicle.

The legislature also failed to adopt a new ethics law that's needed in Connecticut. It would allow the revocation of a state pension for an official convicted of corruption.

For the moment, legislative leaders say their special session will be called to renew the real estate conveyance tax at current levels for municipalities; it brings \$40 million to local cities and towns.

If the tax is not renewed, municipalities would have large holes in their budgets. For example, Danbury would lose \$750,000, New Fairfield \$200,000 and Ridgefield \$450,000.

Other unfinished business should be added to the special session agenda -- including the open container law, funding for reading programs and the plight of nursing homes and nonprofit groups that run group homes.

This is an election year for legislators. More should be required of them than this do-nothing legislative session.