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**EDITORIAL**

**Last-Minute Legislative Scramble Not Pretty**

**Rats, Deals: Pitfalls in making the legislative sausage**

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Lawmaking as the General Assembly's adjournment deadline draws nigh is never a pretty picture. This year was no different than usual as the curtain came down on the 2013 session.

Yes, the legislature finished the state budget and the rest of its agenda on time (midnight on Wednesday, June 5) and didn't have to reconvene to finish up. It deserves credit for that.

But after the session ended, as always, "rats" — the name for changes in a bill's language that can materially affect what the measure does — were discovered hiding in legislation, put there by the bill's authors, negotiators or persons unknown as the session rushes to a close. This is done without benefit of a public hearing and without the knowledge of most of the members of either chamber.

The most notable rat discovered this year so far — although this may change — is language that switched the date when undocumented immigrants would be allowed to have Connecticut driver's licenses from 2015 to this year — a big switch.

This was said to be a mere mistake. Maybe. Maybe not. Supporters of the bill have said that at least a year is needed to prepare for a smooth and successful change.

A session's final days are also prone to a frenzy of last-minute deal-making — never a hospitable climate for sober, sensible negotiating.

For example, on the final day of this session, a popular bill to create a new Office of Early Childhood died because Democratic backers of the bill wouldn't accede to House Republican leader Larry Cafero's unreasonable demand to, among other things, schedule a vote on a bill permitting bow hunting on Sundays. Senate leaders wouldn't be pushed into calling a vote on such a low-priority bill.

The Early Childhood Office would have streamlined and improved school readiness, child care and other services that are now spread across five agencies. But its fate was ultimately tethered to a bow hunting bill because time was short. It should have been taken up much earlier in the session.

Another bill that should have been taken up earlier in the Senate had passed almost unanimously in the House and had the blessing of the bipartisan Sentencing Commission. The bill would have eliminated life sentences for juveniles and allowed a second look for those given long sentences as young teens, once they'd served a big chunk of their time.

These rats and busted deals illustrate the need for the introduction of fewer bills, much better time management and a far greater commitment to transparency.

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