

The Reporter Dispatch

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Bossism bottles up insurance bill

A state bill that would require insurance companies to pay extra if they wrongfully denied settlements to their policy-holders has both merit and legislative support - enough of both to deserve a vote in both houses of the Legislature.

Don't count on it Merit and support don't mean much when one of the all-powerful legislative leaders - in this case Senate Majority leader Joseph Bruno - has made up *his* mind that his colleagues will not be allowed to make up their own.

Bruno is stifling a vote on a bill that has passed the Assembly several years in a row. It would make auto and home insurers subject to paying legal fees and punitive damages when they are successfully sued over nonpayment of a claim. Now, critics argue convincingly, an insurance company has nothing to lose -other than the original claim - if a policyholder has to go to court to force a payment

Besides backing in the Democratic-dominated Assembly, the bill has the important support of Sen. Guy Velella, R-Bronx/Westchester, who heads the Senate's insurance committee. Velella has considerable expertise in this field and considerable political influence. Yet even he, apparently, can be easily ignored when Boss Bruno decides a vote will not happen.

This is no way to run a Legislature