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My Word

Bills complicate insurance claims

By Carol Dornan and Greg Noland

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A storm is coming. You prepare. Yet in the middle of the night, disaster strikes.

Thank God you have insurance. You call a contractor, mitigate the damage, and wait for your insurer to ride in on a white horse. You trust that services rendered in the interim will be paid by insurance; you sign the invoice and are reminded that everything with your insurer will be handled.

Peace of mind. A safe home. A system that works.

But, if Big Insurance lobbyists get their way this session in Tallahassee, that peace of mind will be gone, and you'll be at the mercy of the insurance company's adjuster, who often shows up days or weeks after the emergency repair work is done.

Supporters of this legislation are asking Floridians to trust insurance companies to want to pay your claims, treat you fairly, and cover you after Tallahassee gives them the right to arbitrarily decide whether they will honor the work done to your home.

Yes, you read that right.

The bills, Senate Bill 1064 and House Bill 669, end "assignment of benefits" in property claims. AOBs are so ingrained in American business practice that when searching "Assignment of Benefits" on the Internet, you get: "An arrangement by which a patient requests that their health benefit payments be made directly to a designated person or facility, such as a physician or hospital."

That's right. Every time you go to a doctor, you use an AOB — a process that is simple, easy and effective and has worked well in Florida for almost 100 years.

But, the bill working its way through Tallahassee will force homeowners to pay out of pocket for repairs because contractors/vendors will not be willing to do the work without some hope of being able to secure payment after the job is done. The bill even prevents the contractor/vendor from suing the insurance company to recover the repair costs and denies you, the property owner, the ability to empower the contractor/vendor.

In the end, homes go unfixed or homeowners "go cheap" and get preyed upon by unlicensed contractors willing to do the work for a much cheaper price.

We hope all roofers, contractors and homeowners will call and email their legislators before it's too late. After all, when did Noah build the ark? Before the rain.

Carol Dornan is a retired Detroit police-department detective. Greg Noland is a roofing contractor. Both live in Clermont.

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