

Newsday

LONG ISLAND

WEDNESDAY, JULY 19, 2006 | LONG ISLAND EDITION

50¢

Revenge, racism alleged

■ Lawyer who led legal fight to get Nassau legislator removed from post sues county over unpaid legal fees

BY CELESTE HADRICK
STAFF WRITER

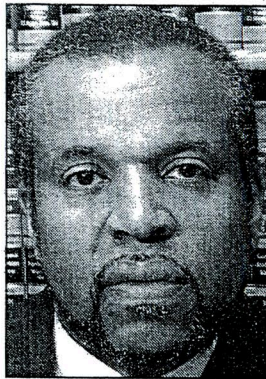
Civil rights attorney Fred Brewington sued Nassau and its legislature yesterday, charging that county officials have refused to pay legal fees he earned during the lawmakers' leadership fight earlier this year, in part because he is black.

Brewington contends that the county's failure to pay him while paying white attorneys involved in the six-week-long dispute is a "discriminatory and retaliatory

pattern and practice based on plaintiff's race and color." County officials denied Brewington's race played any part in holding up his check.

In a lawsuit filed in State Supreme Court in Nassau, Brewington says he is owed \$39,988 in legal fees for representing Legis. Roger Corbin and Legis. Lisanne Altmann. But he is demanding more than \$100,000 in damages for fraud, breach of contract, violation of fair labor practices and racial discrimination.

"They have forced my hand,"



Fred Brewington

Brewington said yesterday. "I'm sure what they would like me to do is close my office down by not paying me."

County Attorney Lorna Goodman blamed the legislature for the delay, saying she had sent a contract for Brewington's legal bills to lawmakers for approval on March 3.

Presiding Officer Judy Jacobs said she held Brewington's contract because she was waiting for a contract from the county attorney's office to pay the legal bills of attorney

Steven Schlesinger, who represented her side in the leadership battle.

"The idea was to do both together and close this up once and for all," Jacobs said. "Our feeling wasn't to hold up Fred as much as it was to make certain it goes through together."

Jacobs said she'd understood that the county attorney's office would be sending Schlesinger's contract to the legislature this week — but Goodman said she has yet to reach an agreement with him on the amount.

The leadership battle began in January when Democrat Corbin, backed by fellow Democrat Altmann, tried to oust Jacobs as presiding officer and take the post with Republican votes. Jacobs and her Democratic allies sued to prevent Corbin

or Minority Leader Peter Schmitt from getting her job. Ultimately, Jacobs prevailed.

At the time, Goodman authorized legislators to hire outside counsel to defend themselves. While Goodman has paid most of the lawyers' bills, Brewington's tab exceeded the \$25,000 limit the county attorney can pay without legislative approval.

Initially, Goodman said she would not pay Schlesinger's \$63,000 bill because he sued the county. Although Schlesinger was the driving force behind the legal maneuvering that kept Jacobs her job, Goodman now says she will him for work on lawsuits he did not officially initiate.

Corbin could not be reached, but Altmann said, "My feeling is we need to be done with the lawsuits and pay the lawyers."