would still allow victims to sue the manufacturers for medical expenses with no ceiling. Earlier in the month, Representative Edward Madigan (R–Ill.) introduced a bill drawn up by Lederle Laboratories that would set up a federal compensation program and provide manufacturers strong protection against liability claims.

Representative Henry Waxman (D–Calif.) in the meantime recently sent four dozen questions to vaccine manufacturers, asking details about their insurance and liability costs and set a 1 May deadline for response. A Waxman aide said that Madigan cosigned the letter and that the two legislators agreed to hold off on moving any legislation until they hear from the companies.—**MARJORIE SUN**

NASA, NOAA Make a Deal

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) are close to settling a technical dispute over launch vehicles with a deal that could have major implications for both agencies in the 1990's.

In a meeting on 1 April, NOAA administrator Anthony Calio and NASA's deputy associate administrator for space science and applications, Samuel W. Keller, worked out a framework in which NOAA would use the space shuttle to launch its next three polar-orbiting weather satellites—known as NOAA K, L, and M—instead of using cheaper, refurbished Titan II ICBM's being offered by the Air Force. NASA, in return, would make up the roughly $90 million price difference, much of which stems from modifications required in the NOAA spacecraft so that the satellites can be launched on the shuttle.

Coupled with NASA's recent agreement limiting the Air Force's own use of Titan launchers (*Science*, 22 March, p. 1445), the pact with NOAA would end a period of uncertainty for NASA. Agency officials have been deeply concerned that the loss of payloads would lower the shuttle flight rate in coming years, drive up the cost per flight, and make the shuttle less and less competitive with Europe's Ariane launcher. (*Science*, 24 August, 1984, p. 812).

In the long run, however, there is a much more important element to the NASA-NOAA agreement. NASA would officially commit itself to building an unmanned, polar-orbiting instrument platform as part of its space-station program—something that John McElroy, head of NOAA's satellite and information service, has eagerly been seeking—and NOAA would promise that this next batch of free-flying weather satellites will be its last: all subsequent weather instruments will be placed on the platform, where they can be serviced, repaired, and replaced by astronauts operating from the shuttle. Thus, NASA would be given its first firm requirement for a piece of the space station and its first firm customer.

—**M. MITCHELL WALDROP**

House Committee Questions SSC

Concerned about the potential for failure and cost overruns, the House Science and Technology Committee has put the Department of Energy (DOE) on notice that it will not support funding the Superconducting Super Collider (SSC) until sufficient work has been done on the magnet system. In a report due out 16 April, the committee takes a stern approach toward the proposed project. It states that the $20 million now being spent annually for research is inadequate to enable the project to begin construction in 1988 as many have hoped.

"The committee wants to emphasize . . . that the basic issue facing the SSC for the next several years is not when and where the SSC will be built, rather the issue is whether or not the SSC should be built," says the committee. Chairman Don Fuqua (D–Fla.) and committee members instructed DOE not to submit a formal project proposal until it can provide a detailed design of the SSC with full cost estimates; document the engineering feasibility; and produce a planning schedule covering magnet manufacturing, construction and start-up timetables.

Of prime concern to the science committee are the costs of the magnets. Fuqua and other members want to be assured not only that the technical challenges of manufacturing and performance can be achieved, but also that required cost reductions can be obtained. "It is apparent that neither the funding nor the time scale presently envisioned will be adequate . . . ," says the committee, "to give confidence in the magnet system if the SSC is submitted in the fiscal year 1988 budget submission."

One committee aide observes that the Tevatron superconducting magnets at Fermilab cost $50,000 each. At this level, the SSC's magnet system would cost more than $5 billion. Revised estimates by DOE now put the cost of the accelerator at $6 billion, assuming magnet costs could be sharply reduced and that construction can commence in 1988.

The science committee's objections to the current course of the SSC's development goes beyond magnets. It criticizes the program for the "lack of industrial and foreign participation" at this early stage.—**MARK CRAWFORD**

Disarmament Chain Letter Takes on Life of Its Own

In 1982, Yosiaki Ito, an entomology professor at Nagoya University, sent a letter to ten scientific colleagues in the West in an effort to drum up support from the scientific community for the United Nations' Second Special Session on Disarmament, which was scheduled to take place later that year. He asked his colleagues to write to ten other scientists expressing the need for nuclear disarmament. Thus was started a chain letter that seems to have taken on a life of its own.

According to Ito, as many as 70,000 scientists have now written letters, and the missives are still circulating in the scientific community more than 2 years after the disarmament meeting took place. Ito bases his estimate on the fact that many of those who have written to their colleagues have sent him a copy of their letters. By the end of last November, he had received more than 6000 copies from 86 countries. They include almost 1600 from the United States, 106 from the Soviet Union, and about 3000 from Western Europe. Ito is now wondering how to make use of this unexpectedly prolific letter writing.—**COLIN NORMAN**