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Ouch! Painful lawsuits could resume if a tax fund remains inaccessible.

Vaccine Injury Compensation Program has socked away more than \$600 million in a trust fund. Meanwhile, lawsuits against manufacturers are down, and the vaccine industry is on the rebound. But those gains may be ephemeral, be-

cause last year then-President George Bush vetoed a tax bill that included reauthorization for the excise tax. Since 1 January, the government has lacked authority to collect the tariff or spend money in the fund.

To revive the compensation program, Senator Ted Kennedy (D-MA) cosponsored a stopgap measure on 18 February that instructs claims courts to continue receiving vaccine injury cases under the 1986 law. Senator Orrin Hatch (R-UT), a cosponsor, claims that already the lack of a tax has made pediatricians and manufacturers nervous. The Senate is working on a solution, but it can't act without receiving a proposal from the House, because all tax bills originate there. On that front, a large tax bill with the vaccine levy is expected to be introduced before summer.

Childhood Vaccine Fund in Limbo

In recent days, President Bill Clinton has led a high-profile attack on the pharmaceutical industry over the high price of childhood vaccines. Lost in all the fireworks, however, is a ticking time bomb: an uncollected tax that threatens the supply and delivery of these vaccines.

By the mid-1980s, many vaccine manufacturers had been driven out of the business by liability suits over alleged harm from children's vaccines, and vaccine supplies were running low. To prevent further erosion of supplies, in 1986 Congress created a system that allowed people injured by vaccines to recover damages without suing the manufacturers. Payment would come from an excise tax on childhood vaccines.

Since taking shape in 1988, the

Endangered Gorillas Caught in Crossfire

Civil war in Rwanda has forced the famous mountain gorilla research center founded by Dian Fossey to close its doors indefinitely. *Science* has learned that on 18 February, soldiers of the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF) invaded and looted the Karisoke Research Center near Ruhengeri.

Fossey, a primatologist who began her work under Louis Leakey, founded Karisoke in 1967 and was murdered there in 1985. Karisoke is located in the Parc National des Volcans, which straddles the borders of Rwanda, Uganda, and Zaire, and is home to more than 300 mountain gorillas (*Gorilla gorilla beringei*).

Since 1990, Karisoke has been caught in the crossfire of two factions: The RPF, made up of exiles who fled Rwanda after its independence in 1962, and the Rwandan government. During the conflict, forces have laid mines in the park and twice have forced the evacuation of foreign researchers from Karisoke. But this is the first time that Rwandese staff have fled the center. "That makes it very critical, very dangerous for the gorillas," says Rutgers anthropologist H. Dieter Steklis, the center's director.

Scientists fear what may befall the untended gorillas. With the research center closed, the goril-

las "may no longer be sacrosanct," warns Kelly Stewart, a primatologist at the University of California, Davis. That worries Steklis, too. "Every time these hostilities heat up, we notice a dramatic rise in poaching," he says.

Steklis flew to the United States earlier this week to ask the U.S. government and the United Nations to persuade the rebels to allow Karisoke researchers to return to work safely.

House Weighs In on NIH AIDS Research

A bill that would radically restructure the way the National Institutes of Health (NIH) plans and funds AIDS research hit some turbulence last week. But the bill has emerged intact and on the verge of landing on the House floor for a vote.

The NIH-AIDS legislation gained steam on 18 February, when the Senate passed a bill that would shift overarching control of AIDS research from the individual NIH institutes to a beefed-up Office of AIDS Research (OAR) within NIH. Then on 24 February, the House passed an amendment by Representative Henry Waxman (D-CA) that added similar powers to OAR—but the House version significantly differed from the Senate's on a few key points.

For one thing, while the Senate said the discretionary fund should consist of 25% of new AIDS money NIH receives each year, the House offered a hard number: \$100 million. And in an attempt to quell a fear triggered by the Senate bill that OAR would slow the pace of research, the House version stipulates that OAR must pass money to the various NIH institutes within 30 days of receipt. While marking up the House amendment, Waxman's subcommittee defeated by one vote a Republican-led attempt to strike the budget language altogether.

As *Science* went to press, the NIH bill was about to be voted on by Representative John Dingell's (D-MI) Committee on Energy and Commerce, a prelude to a vote by the full House.

Los Alamos Biologist Evicted for 'Insubordination'

Ever feel out of touch with your field? James Fee has it worse. The biologist, who until recently directed the Los Alamos National Laboratory's Stable Isotope Resource (SIR), says he feels as if he's been under "scientific house arrest" ever since he was evicted from his own lab last month.

As Fee tells it, on 28 January his boss, Alexander Gancarz, leader of the isotope and nuclear chemistry division, arrived at Fee's lab followed by two guards with automatic weapons. Gancarz marched him out of the lab, Fee says, then handed him a note saying he was on investigatory leave for "insubordination," and that Fee was barred from returning to the lab and speaking to colleagues until further notice. Specifically, it said: "You are not to contact or communicate with any of the scientists or administrators associated with the Stable Isotope Resource or with any other of your projects at the laboratory." He was also told not to call other federal agencies.

For the past 8 years, Fee has served as director of the SIR, which supplies labeled research materials to biomedical scientists around the country, and conducted his own research on cell respiration. According to Fee, the alleged act of insubordination was his decision to write directly to the Department of Energy's research office in January, without approval from his superiors, suggesting a new isotope program.

Gancarz says insubordination is one of several pending charges against Fee, which he declines to name "in fairness to the employee." Gancarz denies that he called the guards to escort Fee out; they're always around the lab, he says. And he claims the order was not intended to silence Fee—rather, it was designed to prevent him from representing himself officially as SIR chief. Los Alamos is now seeking a new SIR director, having removed Fee. In addition, Gancarz says the lab has launched a top-level review of the case due to be completed in 2 weeks.