Early last year, Representative Edward I. Koch (D–N.Y.) introduced a bill in the House that would extend the provisions of the New York law nationwide. A couple of months later, Senator Hubert H. Humphrey (D–Minn.) introduced similar legislation in the Senate, and a press release described the bill as one that would require federally assisted hospitals to "routinely test newborn infants for metabolic disorders that could retard brain development." Neither the Koch bill nor the Humphrey bill has been acted on, and may not be now that the National Genetic Disease Act is so close to passage.

Scientists and legal-scholars fault the disease-by-disease approach to mass screening, well-intentioned though it may be, on a number of grounds. Sickle cell screening points up two of them. In the first place, critics say there is no point in identifying sickle cell babies at birth because there is no treatment that can be offered them then and the clinical signs of the disease will not show up until later. Second, for technical reasons, it is not possible to identify sickle cell babies without also identifying those that carry the sickle cell trait, a benign condition that presents problems only if two trait carriers plan to bear children. Many individuals think the trait is a stigma, although it is utterly groundless to think so. Many geneticists oppose newborn sickle cell screening because it may do more harm than good.

Then, there is the matter of mental retardation. Sickle cell anemia does not cause mental retardation. Neither, for that matter, does adenosine deaminase deficiency, another of the conditions singled out for screening in the New York law. Yet it is certainly possible that they may be linked together in the public mind as a matter of guilt by association.

There are other questions. Adenosine deaminase deficiency, which was, for instance, mentioned originally in the pending Wisconsin bill, is a condition that has been associated with a rare and lethal immune disorder, combined immunodeficiency disease (CID). In the absence of adequate adenosine deaminase, the lymphocytes of the immune system cannot develop properly and the patient is left without natural immune defenses. Symptoms of CID show up by the time a child is 4 to 6 months old. The only available treatment is bone marrow transplantation. Some immunologists believe that the only advantage of neonatal screening in this case is that, if one found an affected child, one would have a 4 to 6 months head start in looking for a genetically compatible bone marrow donor if the child had no sister or brother whose genetic makeup matched his own. It may be only a modest advantage—CID children

Rocky Speaks at AAAS Meeting

Boston. Vice President Nelson A. Rockefeller topped off the AAAS meeting on 23 February with an address which mixed encomiums for American science with warnings of "a certain questioning of" American technological achievements and a "growing cynicism respecting their value." Rockefeller clearly had mainly in mind the current debate over development of nuclear power, declaring "nuclear power is not going to go away . . . nor can it be suppressed by any group or nation."

Rockefeller had pointed criticism for opponents of nuclear power, who were represented in earlier, well-attended energy sessions of the meeting. "There is always risk in invention, in discovery . . . and yet listening to the debates and reading the emotional arguments about energy sources and energy technology, one wonders at times whether we are dealing with a world of science and fact or a world of superstition and fear." Rockefeller went on to say better mechanisms must be developed for "bringing into focus the facts and informed, mature, objective judgments of the scientific community."

The AAAS annual meeting continues to be the nation's biggest intellectual bazaar, but this year there was little tumult and hardly any shouting. The spirit of 1976 (the meeting theme was Science and Our Expectations—Bicentennial and Beyond) seemed to be a reflective one. AAAS top officers noted that in recent years science had been blamed for environmental damage and for use in the Vietnam war. Now, however, retiring AAAS president Margaret Mead observed, people are realizing that the "misapplication of technology" was culpable. Resentment against science among students and the public generally is easing, and the government attitude toward basic science is more favorable.

The disruptions of previous years were absent from this year's sessions. Political activists and AAAS officials seemed to have traded confrontation for coexistence, if not congeniality. The Science for the People group, which had been the chief antagonist of the AAAS in past years, had a room of its own and even planned several sessions for the regular program.

Meeting attendance stood at about 4700 on the next to the last day of the meeting (23 February), somewhat less than AAAS planners had hoped for. They saw the explanation for the shortfall in the scheduling of the meeting while many colleges and universities are in session and in the tightness of travel funds in the current economy. The weather, often a factor in snarling transportation schedules during AAAS winter meetings, was generally favorable, but the ubiquitous flu bug took its toll of participants, staff, and audience and the hacking cough was the characteristic sound in the halls.

Perhaps the most notable innovation at this year's meeting was the special effort made to invite and accommodate handicapped persons studying or working in science. AAAS staff and volunteers provided assistance and services to the record number of handicapped—between 150 and 200—who attended. These services ranged from special transportation arrangements and a resource room for the handicapped to interpreters for the deaf at meetings, escorts, and such small but helpful touches as a short version of the program in Braille and emergency repair facilities for wheelchairs and other devices.

The AAAS Council, the big elective body which meets annually to act on major policy matters, concentrated this year on international issues in voting resolutions. Two of three resolutions approved dealt with United States–Soviet relations and the third with the United Nations General Assembly. In the latter resolution, the council endorsed a AAAS board resolve opposing the assembly position in declaring Zionism a form of racism.

In a council resolution prompted by the Vladivostok agreement on nuclear arms, the council noted that agreement had resulted in a "destabilizing" increase in weapons levels and urged the U.S. to work for agreements on several points and "Move toward a phased mutual reduction of nuclear weapons levels that will ultimately lead to a renunciation of their use in warfare."

The final resolution cited the "violation of internationally recognized scientific norms" in the Soviet Union and asked the AAAS president to express concern to the president of the Soviet Academy of Science that Soviet practices be changed to permit emigration of scientists who seek it and "to grant human rights intrinsic to the advancement of world science."—J.W.