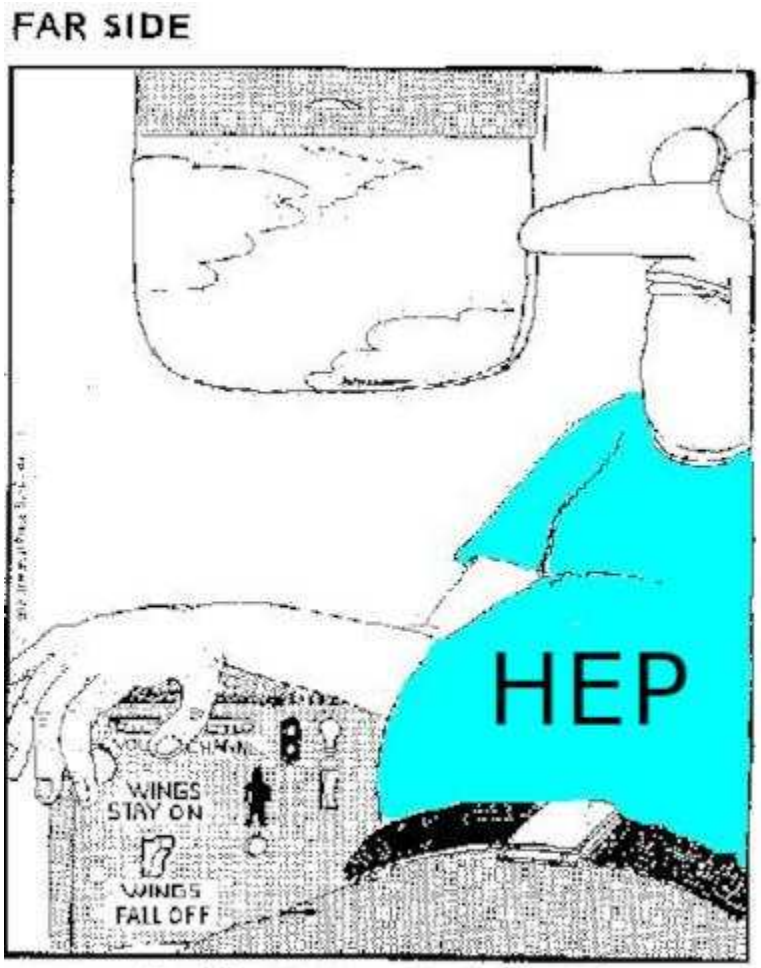
Who killed the SSC?

In the 1980's congress approved a giant machine for high energy physics, the Superconducting Super Collider (SSC). It was proposed to collide proton beams on each other with a combined energy of 40 Trillion electron volts at a cost of about 8 Billion dollars. This energy would have been sufficient to produce the supersymmetric particles thought to exist at the trillion electron volt scale, explain dark matter, and illuminate many other questions about the structure of matter.

Abandoning the project a few years later conceded leadership in experimental physics to Europe and greatly slowed the progress in particle theory although new mysteries continued to pile up.



Fumbling for his recline button, Bob unwittingly instigates a disaster.

The demise of the Superconducting Supercollider project in 1993 is often dismissed as a result of cost overruns. Was it's hefty price tag just a bridge too far for US science at the time? Other science projects at a similar cost have gone ahead. A deeper analysis suggests a confluence of causes.

Number 1: The sitting president at the time, Bill Clinton, was from a state with no involvement and little interest in high energy physics.

Number 2: The condensed matter and nuclear physics communities were afraid that a costly project in high energy physics would come at the cost of some of their favorite projects.

Number 3: The high energy community did not appreciate the political boost that could come from expanding in an underrepresented part of the country.

Number 4: The high energy physics leadership was cool to accepting shared governance of the project with partner countries.

Number 5: The existing high energy laboratories lost interest in the project when a site was chosen in Texas.

In short, to paraphrase Pogo who paraphrased Julius Caesar:

"We have met the enemy and he was us"