

Director's Corner

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Mike Harrison

A trip to Washington

Today's issue features a Director's Corner from Mike Harrison, GDE Americas Regional Director.

Pre-ambule: One of the jobs of a Regional Director is to elicit support for the project beyond the traditional high-energy physics community. In this role Mike Harrison describes a recent trip to Washington to talk to the US Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP); the home of the Presidential Science Advisor.

So here I am, early in the morning preparing to leave. It's still dark outside and aargh, upon opening up the garage door I am greeted by fresh snow. By this winter's standards it's not a lot of snow, three to four inches (seven to ten centimetres), but sufficient to make getting the car out of my uphill sloping driveway problematic. If I need to shovel off the driveway then getting to the airport in time could prove interesting. A quick pause to down the last gulp of tea, wipe the ketchup stain off the tie, put out some birdseed into the feeder – they have a hard time in the snow – and we're off. Accelerating violently backwards out of the garage, I shoot up the driveway and skid sideways onto the road outside. No shoveling needed. Fortunately no-one is around at this ungodly time of day to witness this manoeuvre. I regain some semblance of car control and head out rather cautiously towards the airport. I hope the planes are flying. The web site indicates that all flights are operating but I have found to my cost previously that the web site isn't generally updated by this time of day.

On entering the terminal the day improves immediately; the flight is on time and the security line is short. Laptop out of the bag, shoes removed, and off I go. Only seasoned travellers here, so everyone knows the drill and the line moves briskly. Into the terminal now, and in the half hour before the flight leaves I try and login on the new wi-fi system recently installed by our local cable TV company. It works. Who is sufficiently nocturnal to be sending me e-mails at this time of day? The answer is (of course) — Europe. The ILC never sleeps!

The flight is announced and we shuffle off down the gangway. The day previous to this was Valentine's Day and the ground crew have decorated the gangway with all kinds of artifacts pertaining to romance, a veritable tunnel of love. The passengers seem stoically unimpressed. Not much sentimentality evident in this bunch. Still the ground crew appear to be enjoying themselves with whispered innuendos so it's not been completely in vain.

On the short trips to Washington or Chicago I use my local airport. It's very convenient and avoids having to drive into New York City. There is only one slight drawback. It doesn't fly to Washington, only Baltimore. So after a short flight I take the airport shuttle to pick up the train to Washington from the nearby station. It is a well-known fact that airport shuttles like to travel in packs like dogs, but it does add insult to injury when three of them choose to park 100 metres away from the pick-up point in full view of the erstwhile passengers waiting in the cold. Why can't they make us feel better and hide around the corner? Eventually one of them breaks free from its friends and transports us to the train station from where I take a short train ride to Union Station in Washington.

It is evident walking around that the business of Washington is government. Everywhere you go you see people sporting ID badges around their necks. There seems to be some form of hierarchy involving the number (and size) of badges people adorn themselves with. My attempt to blend in with the crowd with my puny DOE badge merely seems to advertise my non-Washington status. As with most things down here the military seem to have the upper hand in this game with by far the most impressive adornments. Centuries of sporting medals perhaps have left their mark or perhaps maybe their chests



Within shouting distance

just stick out further.

Finally I arrive at the building that houses OSTP. It's very close to the White House. Possibly allowing them to shout out of the windows at each other when the telephones break down. Another security check, I gain a visitor badge (very small and unimpressive) and I'm in. The meeting itself is pleasant and hopefully useful to them; they said it was but they are also very polite people. I don't see the science advisor himself but rather the federal research director and two senior science policy analysts. I have talked to the research director and one of the analysts before so they are already aware of who and what we are. I update them on the project status and future plans. They are quite interested in superconducting radiofrequency technology, project timelines and of course the global nature of what we're trying to do. OSTP likes to be aware of potentially significant science projects and they don't come much bigger than ours. Project approval will require the concurrence of multiple agencies in the US and providing a narrative to OSTP will be useful when the time comes. At their request I also provide a brief update on the current LHC status. Another example of how we sink or swim together in this business. Since I'm not asking them to actually do anything at this time besides listen, it's a cordial audience. A sharp bunch of people such as this generally finds high-energy physics intellectually appealing anyway which also helps.



The meeting breaks up and we agree that I will visit again in six months, my normal schedule with OSTP. Back out into the snow and I start to retrace my steps towards home. The weather threatens once more. A beer in Union station on the way home looks like a good idea at this point.

-- *Mike Harrison*