

Director's Corner

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Mike Harrison

It's that time of the year again

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

It seems that my turn to produce a guest column for Director's Corner falls each time (statistics of two) within a few weeks of the start of the US fiscal year, which begins on 1 October. Given the arcane nature of the US budgetary system, I will describe this process, since the resources available to us, or the lack thereof, serve to drive the scope of the US ILC R&D effort. For that small, selective group of people out there who already understand these machinations, my apologies, for the rest of you, here goes!

The first step takes place about 18 months before the start of the fiscal year when the Office of High Energy Physics (OHEP), following guidance from the Department of Energy (DOE) Office of Science, develops a strawman funding proposal for the US HEP programme. For reference: the current HEP budget was of the order of \$700M for this fiscal year (FY08). This is communicated to the administration (meaning the President) through the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). The OMB receives this kind of input from all branches of the government and modifies these various inputs to reflect the administration's priorities and overall budget constraints. Iterations between OMB and the various government departments are common during this stage of the process, which finally concludes when the so-called President's budget is announced, typically around February. The President's budget is then picked up by the House of Representatives (also known as Congress) who, through their various working committees such as Science and Technology and the associated appropriations sub-committees, produce their version of the budget, the House budget. This is generally available by early summer. The degree to which the President's budget is reflected in the House version is, of course, strongly influenced by the politics of the day, both national and local. A similar process takes place in the Senate who produce their own version of the budget later in the summer. Thus at this point there are three possible budgets in play.



Americas Regional Director Mike Harrison explains the American budget system.

The House and the Senate then get together to resolve their differences in a joint conference. Quite often this is nothing more than a 'split-the-difference' formula. The resulting budget is then sent back to the President to be signed into law in time for the start of the new fiscal year. Or at least such is the theory.

Given the scenario I have just described it is evident that the budget which gets back to the President may or may not look anything like the one which the administration offered up seven months earlier. The degree of alignment is strongly influenced by the political majorities of the various branches of government which currently show Democratic majorities in the House and Senate, and of course a Republican President. In order to produce a budget that meets approval by everyone, i.e. something the President is willing to sign, another round of negotiations is required. This is typically where the real work is done, and these discussions can prove exceedingly difficult to conclude. (It was at this point in the process earlier this year that the FY08 US ILC budget was zeroed out in what is traditionally referred to as a smoke-filled room scenario.) Of course during this whole period the clock continues to run. If no budget is signed into law by 1 October, then technically the government runs out of money and the government is obliged to shut down. This actually happened for a few days during the Clinton administration and it wasn't pretty. To avoid such a scenario a temporary budget called a continuing resolution (CR) is almost always adopted. A CR has proved necessary for the last seven fiscal years and we are anticipating another one in a few weeks. There are quite a few rules about how a CR is implemented, but the basic idea is that the budget is held flat with respect to the previous year.

So where does that leave the US ILC programme for FY09? Crystal balls or chicken entrails are just as useful in divining the way forward. What we do know is that the FY09 baseline budget is \$35M. We know this because the Presidential, House and Senate budgets all agree on this number. The impact of a CR would be to scale this number by the ratio of the actual FY08 budget to the FY09 baseline budget, which is close to 84% for the HEP programme. Thus we are preparing our US plan based on a near-term budget of \$29M. This is sufficient to enable the high-priority R&D items to restart and we will be working hard to smoothly re-integrate the US scientists and programme back into our global ILC R&D enterprise. With the reduced funding some activities will be deferred until the CR is replaced by the official FY09 budget. With US presidential elections in a couple of months, we project that it will take six months or so for a new budget to emerge. Hopefully this new budget will reflect the agreed-upon \$35M, but there are many possible variations on how the CR will end. At this point no one knows for sure what will be forthcoming.

And then the cycle starts again ...

-- *Mike Harrison*