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DOE Perspectives on the Supercollider

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The Superconducting Super Collider was to be built in Texas at a cost of more than $8B and completed in 1999. It would have been the most expensive scientific instrument ever built with a discovery potential far exceeding any existing accelerator. If it had been completed, the future of continued discovery at the "energy frontier" of high energy physics would be assured and the fortunes of high energy physics in the United States would be much more robust. There were many issues that contributed to the final decision by Congress to cease funding of the SSC. Some of these were: perceived value of the SSC's science; competition for funding in an environment of constrained federal funding (e.g. the Space Station); attacks by parts of the scientific community; management issues; cost growth; lack of significant foreign participation; and lowering of the national priority of physics at the end of the Cold War. Real and perceived issues were used by dedicated Congressional opponents to kill the SSC. There are differing opinions as to which factors were the most important and which could have been avoided. There are many stories about what happened behind the scenes at high levels of government. Perhaps more important than the history of what went wrong are the lessons learned from project management to the politics of very large projects. The viewpoints expressed in this talk are based on my involvement in the SSC primarily as Deputy Director of DOE's Office of Science.