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As the countdown to the switch on of the Large Hadron Collider (LHC) draws to a close, there is palpable excitement within the high-energy-physics community worldwide. The LHC, based at CERN, the European particle-physics laboratory near Geneva, will be the most powerful collider on the planet and is widely expected to deliver exciting new physics — as well as job opportunities.

But for those physicists working at Fermilab in Batavia, Illinois, any excitement about fresh results is tempered by the imminent demise of the Tevatron, the ageing accelerator that will shortly cede its crown to the LHC. It is doubly unfortunate, therefore, that US physics is also facing broad uncertainties over its federal budget.

Some suggest that the shift of the 'energy frontier' from the United States to Europe need not spell disaster for Fermilab, arguing that its stable of experts will be needed to help make sense of the steady stream of data emerging from the LHC (see page 258). After all, as Fermilab director, Pier Oddone, has pointed out, the lab's scientists are involved in both colliders. And for a little while, as the LHC reaches full operating status, there may be some healthy competition between the two as Fermilab makes a last-ditch attempt to detect the Higgs boson, the elusive particle that is one of the LHC's main goals.

But the experience of working on high-energy physics at Fermilab may begin to pall compared with what can be gained at the LHC, where the tacit knowledge associated with operating and tweaking the machine will feed discussions, elucidate problems and spark fresh insight. US-based researchers had hoped to be preparing to build and host the LHC's successor, the much-discussed International Linear Collider. But that has yet to be confirmed, and with the current budget woes for US physics, it seems unlikely to win approval. Money dedicated to projects one year can disappear the next on Congress's whim, which makes hosting huge international projects difficult. Those interested in a career in high-energy physics may therefore continue to head towards Europe for some years to come.

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