

## Stem Cell Policy Hampering Research, NIH Official Says

By Rick Weiss  
Washington Post Staff Writer  
Saturday, January 20, 2007; A04

The National Institutes of Health official overseeing the implementation of President Bush's embryonic stem cell policy yesterday suggested that the controversial program is delaying cures, an unusually blunt assessment for an executive branch official.

In prepared Senate testimony, Story Landis, director of the NIH's National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke and interim chair of the agency's stem cell task force, closely mirrored previous testimony from other NIH officials, who have for years been careful not to criticize the Bush policy directly, even though that policy has infuriated many scientists because of the limits it places on embryo cell work.

But under questioning, Landis spoke more plainly. When Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.) asked her how the policy was affecting medical research, she said, "We are missing out on possible breakthroughs." The ability to work on newly derived stem cell colonies -- precluded from federal funding under the Bush plan -- "would be incredibly important," she added.

Landis also declared that "science works best when scientists can pursue all avenues of research. If the cure for Parkinson's disease or juvenile diabetes lay behind one of four doors, wouldn't you want the option to open all four doors at once instead of one door?"

Those and related comments left at least some at the hearing wondering whether a Democratic majority in Congress had emboldened the NIH.

But NIH spokesman John Burklow denied that the agency is getting uppity. Landis's testimony "reflects her scientific opinion," he said.

The House passed a bill this month that would loosen Bush's restrictions, and the Senate is poised to do so in February. Bush has promised to veto the bill.