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Dear Dr. Lang and Mrs. Antonious:

I am writing in response to your correspondence of December 19, 2017, concerning federal support for health research, which was forwarded to me on January 17, 2018, by the Honourable Kirsty Duncan, Minister of Science.

This government recognizes that top researchers such as comprise the Canadian Society of Microbiologists and a strong research community are important and that investments in research are good investments. That is why we announced a significant re-investment in research in Budget 2016, including $30 million for the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) to support discovery-based health research.

As you know, Budget 2016 also tasked Minister Duncan with leading a review of federal support for fundamental science. The review, led by Dr. David Naylor and an independent advisory panel of distinguished research leaders and innovators, assessed the program machinery currently in place to support science and scientists in Canada.

As you mentioned, the Fundamental Science Review report made a number of thoughtful recommendations on how to strengthen Canada’s research ecosystem. Based on these, the Government announced the appointment of Dr. Mona Nemer as Canada’s new Chief Science Advisor on September 26. In her role, Dr. Nemer will provide impartial scientific advice to the Prime Minister and the Minister of Science to inform government’s decisions on health and environmental issues that affect all Canadians. She will also make recommendations to help ensure that government science is fully available and accessible to the public. The creation of this new position will be key in promoting a culture of scientific excellence in Canada.
As you will also be aware, the Government announced the creation of the Canada Research Coordinating Committee (CRCC) on October 27, 2017. The CRCC is tasked with improving collaboration among the federal research funding agencies and the Canadian Foundation for Innovation to the benefit of researchers and students across the country.

On November 2, 2017, Minister Duncan announced a series of changes, flowing from the Fundamental Science Review, relating to the Canada Research Chairs Program. These changes respond to the ongoing underrepresentation of women, Indigenous peoples, visible minorities and persons with disabilities and, as part of this exercise, universities have also been asked to prepare equity and diversity plans. We are confident that these changes will contribute to greater diversity in science and ensure that all Canadians who wish to pursue research have the chance to contribute to the Canadian scientific enterprise.

Rest assured I am working with my colleagues, the Minister of Science and the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, to ensure our researchers have the tools, training and financial support they need to make a difference in the health of Canadians. While this begins with strengthening and improving existing coordination efforts across the federal government, it also includes building a case for increased support for fundamental science.

As to additional funding for CIHR, this is usually decided through the annual budget process and is at the discretion of the Minister of Finance and the Prime Minister. I appreciate the recommendations the report has made with regards to more funding for investigator-led research and, like you, look forward to Budget 2018.

Thank you for writing about this important issue. I wish you all the best in your future endeavours.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]

The Honourable Ginette Petitpas Taylor, P.C., M.P.