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HOUSE OF COMMONS

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Dear Dr Greated,

It was a pleasure to welcome you to my parliamentary office at the end of last year to discuss your important work to push science and engineering up the political agenda and showcase the world-leading expertise of those employed in these critical sectors. I am grateful to you for writing to me this week – a letter that I was first made aware of via a press enquiry.

In December, we made an important announcement that a future Conservative government would launch a Sovereign Defence Fund, the details of which were shared transparently and have since been reiterated in a speech made by our Leader, Kemi Badenoch.

We are facing an increasingly serious security situation amid deepening concerns about the government's willingness to step up our military preparedness. These concerns were underlined by former Labour Defence Secretary and NATO Secretary General, Lord Robertson. In calling out this 'corrosive complacency', Lord Robertson echoes the worries we have heard from technologists, defence specialists and scientists about the failure to release the Defence Investment Plan in order that they can step up their own contributions to this national effort.

To be clear, the Conservative pledge to direct £2 billion per year of UKRI funding into a Sovereign Defence Fund to develop dual use technologies does not represent a funding cut but rather an urgently needed redeployment of public funds into research and development projects that serve our national security interests. As the world becomes ever more dangerous, we are clear that we need to focus our remarkable British scientific and technological capabilities more explicitly on defence.

You will be aware that UK Research and Innovation was launched in 2018 under the previous Conservative government and brought together the UK's seven research councils alongside Innovate UK and Research England. Its creation provided greater strategic oversight of the research and innovation system to maximise its contribution to economic growth and societal benefit.

Under Conservative leadership, public R&D funding increased substantially, enabling UKRI to target investment in ways that supported advances in vital sectors of the UK economy, including engineering, technology and the life sciences. UKRI's achievements since that time include our backing of the UK's world-leading National Quantum Strategy to improve our cyber resilience, the Covid-19 Rapid Research and Innovation Fund to improve health outcomes during the pandemic, and the establishment of the UK Catapult scheme to develop regional clusters on medicines discovery, high value manufacturing and compound semiconductor applications. At the General Election, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, who partly oversaw the uplift in research spend, laid the foundations of our Sovereign Defence Fund policy by making clear in our manifesto that research money would be directed more explicitly into a defence uplift.

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Our UKRI investments positioned the UK at the forefront of developments in cutting edge industries, which are central to our national security, competitiveness and economic prosperity. We now want to build on that Conservative legacy of investment in defence and innovation to accelerate Britain's war readiness. Our Fund will mobilise billions in public and private funding to overhaul the defence industrial base, including taking stakes in UK defence start-ups, investing in dual-use companies, and building resilient supply chains.

I reiterate that our commitment to invest in UK defence – and the technological innovation that underpins so much of that spend - is more important than ever. This government's ongoing failure to publish its Defence Investment Plan is undermining confidence and deterring investment and innovation in our domestic industry and expertise at a time of acute and growing geopolitical friction. This was a message that the Conservative Shadow Science, Innovation and Technology team heard repeatedly when we attended the Space Comm conference recently and spoke to scientists and engineers.

Thank you again for taking the time and trouble to write to me.

With best wishes,
Julia