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The Honourable Lisa Raitt
Minister of Natural Resources
House of Commons
OTTAWA ON K1A 0A6

Dear Minister Raitt:

I am writing to you concerning the situation regarding the NRU reactor at Chalk River.

The recent shutdown of this reactor was clearly necessary, but has caused an international shortage of medical isotopes, creating very serious health issues for patients needing isotope-based medical interventions. On a broader economic scale, the isotope shortage carries with it the threat of lasting damage to Canada's reputation across a broad range of nuclear science, including reactor development and construction, neutron scattering, and isotope production; an international reputation of excellence that was developed over six decades of government investment in both pure and applied nuclear research.

As president of the Canadian Association of Physicists (CAP), I welcome your appointment of an expert panel to seek a sustained supply of medical isotopes. I urge that you direct the panel to take a long-term and focused view, one that takes into account the full range of Canada's growing role in nuclear science and engineering. What is needed, and needed promptly, is a candid and informed assessment as to what is best for Canada.

I note that a number of options are being considered. McMaster University has offered to produce medical isotopes in the short term until a longer term solution can be found. The Canadian Institute for Neutron Scattering has proposed a Canadian Neutron Centre to be constructed for medical and research purposes, and the premier of Saskatchewan has stated interest in having such a facility. TRIUMF, if fully funded for a further 5 years, may make feasible the production of medical isotopes with accelerators, transferable to the private sector.

The CAP has considerable expertise in this area and would be happy to assist the panel. I would welcome a discussion with you as to how our organization might be of assistance in this important task.

Sincerely,

Prof. Robert Mann
President, Canadian Association of Physicists
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