

Scottish Parliament votes for Nicola Sturgeon to be First Minister



It would have seemed odd writing this headline only a few months ago, but in Scotland we have a fast moving political landscape at present.

Today the members of the Scottish Parliament have voted the Member for Glasgow Southside as the new First Minister, which is an historic decision for the reason that Nicola Sturgeon is the first female First Minister.

Our photo shows her listening to Alex Salmond make his speech at Prestonfield House Hotel on 6 May 2011 when the current government had just been voted back into power with a majority, and Ms Sturgeon arrived by helicopter with Alex Salmond.

That majority has decreased since then, but the SNP are still the single largest party at Holyrood and Nicola Sturgeon was voted in today with 66 votes in her favour. This was a simple majority of the 120 votes cast. It appears that Labour may all have abstained from voting today.

This is the text of the First Minister's speech which she delivered this afternoon in Holyrood:

Presiding Officer, I thank you for your kind words.

And I thank my fellow members of Parliament for giving me the honour and privilege of being your nominee as the next First Minister of Scotland.

My pledge today to every citizen of our country is simple but

it is heartfelt.

I will be First Minister for all of Scotland.

Regardless of your politics or your point of view, my job is to serve you.

And I promise that I will do so to the best of my ability.

Presiding Officer,

This is a special and very proud moment for me – a working class girl from Ayrshire given the job of heading up the government of Scotland.

It is also a big moment for my family and I am delighted that they join me today.

I am particularly delighted, relieved even, to note that, so far at any rate, my niece and nephews appear to be on their best behaviour!

Presiding Officer,

I am so grateful to all of my family here today – and in particular to my mum, dad, sister and husband – for the unwavering support they have always given me, in everything I have chosen to do.

Now that I am First Minister, I am going to need that support more than ever. I am very lucky in knowing that it will always be there.

I also want to thank my constituency office staff for the invaluable work they do each and every day for me and for my constituents in Glasgow Southside.

Presiding Officer,

Like you, I have been a member of this Parliament since its re-establishment in 1999.

That means that I have had the opportunity, at close quarters, to watch and to learn from all of my predecessors as First Minister.

Each of them, in their own unique ways, have been passionate and diligent advocates for Scotland.

I have great respect for all of them – the late Donald Dewar, Henry McLeish, Jack McConnell and Alex Salmond – and I am genuinely humbled that my name will now be added to that distinguished list.

That our parliament and Government, in just 15 short years, have come to be so firmly established – and, dare I say it, respected – in our national life, is a real testament to the quality of their stewardship.

However, I am sure members will understand why I want to pay a particular tribute today to Alex Salmond.

Without the guidance and support that Alex has given me over more than 20 years, it is unlikely that I would standing here.

I owe him a personal debt of gratitude and it is important to me to put my thanks to him on the public record today.

Presiding Officer,

Alex Salmond's place in history as one of Scotland's greatest leaders is secure and rightly so.

However, I have no doubt that he has a big contribution yet to make to politics in Scotland.

I know that I will continue to seek his wise counsel.

And, who knows, from time to time, he might seek mine too!

Presiding officer,

To become First Minister is special and a big responsibility.

To make history as the first woman First Minister is even more so.

I am reminded today of a quote I once read from Florence Horsburgh – a Conservative MP for Dundee – when in 1936 she became the first woman to reply to what was then the King's Speech in the House of Commons.

She said:

“If in these new and novel surroundings, I acquit myself but poorly, when I sit down I shall at least have two thoughts for my consolation – it has never been done better by a woman before, and whatever else may be said about me, in the future from henceforward, I am historic.”

Presiding officer,

I can sympathise with the sentiment – though I hope not to need any such consolation!

Indeed, I much prefer this quote from the same speech.

“I think of this occasion as the opening of a gate into a new field of opportunity.”

I hope that my election as First Minister does indeed help to open the gate to greater opportunity for all women.

I hope that it sends a strong, positive message to girls and young women – indeed, to all women – across our land.

There should be no limit to your ambition or what you can achieve.

If you are good enough and if you work hard enough, the sky is the limit – and no glass ceiling should ever stop you from achieving your dreams.

Presiding officer

I hope that is the message of my election. As it was of yours.

But it is what I do as First Minister that will matter more – much more – than the example I set by simply holding the office.

Leading by example on equal representation, and encouraging others to follow, addressing low pay, improving childcare – these are the obligations I now carry and I am determined to discharge them on behalf of women across our country.

My niece, who is in the public gallery today, with her brother and her cousins, is 8 years old.

She doesn't yet know about the gender pay gap or under-representation or the barriers, like high childcare costs, that make it so hard for so many women to work and pursue careers.

My fervent hope is that she never will – that by the time she is a young woman, she will have no need to know about any of these issues because they will have been consigned to history.

If – during my tenure as First Minister – I can play a part in making that so, for my niece and for every other little girl in this country, I will be very happy indeed.

Presiding Officer,

I am taking on the responsibilities of First Minister at an exciting time in the nation's history.

All of us, regardless of party, have been inspired and challenged by the flourishing of democracy that we have witnessed during and since the referendum.

Democratic politics in Scotland has never been more alive.

And the expectations that people have of their politicians and their parliament have never been higher.

There is a burning desire across our country to build a more prosperous, fairer and better Scotland.

People didn't just vote Yes for a better country – I know that those who voted No want a better country too.

I intend to lead a government that delivers on those aspirations.

My role as First Minister will be to help build a Scotland that all those who live and work here can be proud of.

A nation both social democratic and socially just.

A Scotland confident in itself, proud of its successes and honest about its weaknesses.

A Scotland of good government and civic empowerment.

A Scotland vigorous and determined in its resolution to address poverty, support business, promote growth and tackle inequality.

These are the points against which my government will set its compass.

I earnestly believe that in doing so, we will reflect the wishes, hopes and desires – the dreams, even – of the Scottish people.

Of course, we will have our differences across parties in this chamber as to the best way forward.

We must never shy away from robust debate, but we should strive always to be constructive and respectful.

I want all members to know that where we are on common ground – and I want to find as much of that as I can – you will find in me a willing and listening ally.

Presiding Officer,

It will surprise no-one to hear that I will always argue the case for more powers – indeed the full powers of independence – for this Parliament.

I believe that the more we are able to do as a parliament and government, the better we can serve the people who elect us.

But I will also – and always – do my utmost to govern well with the powers we have now.

My daily tasks will be to protect and improve our NHS, support our businesses at home and abroad, ensure that all children get the chance to fulfil their potential, and keep our communities safe from crime.

Presiding officer,

I intend to lead a government with purpose.

A government that is bold, imaginative and adventurous.

I know there will be tough decisions to be made, and I may not always get them right.

It is not the case that all manner of things shall be well.

I will face challenges, but I will strive to meet them positively and with fortitude.

And I know that I will be inspired and sustained each and every day by the potential of this country and of the people who live here.

Presiding Officer,

I want to end with another quote, this time from the Earl of Seafield, the Chancellor of Scotland, who signed away Scotland's sovereign independence in 1707.

As he did so, he lamented: "There's ane end of ane auld sang."

The song lay lost for 292 years until we reconvened this parliament in 1999.

This First Minister intends to make sure that we adorn that auld sang with new verses.

Verses that tell of a modern and confident Scotland, fit for purpose and fit for all her people.

Together, let us now write that story.