

# **#SP6 – Nicola Sturgeon address to SNP membership**

**SNP Leader, Nicola Sturgeon, has delivered a message to the SNP conference as part of the SNP's 2021 election campaign asking Scotland to return her and her government to Holyrood.**

In her speech she reminds everyone of the “power grab” by the UK Government on Scotland and the powers of The Scottish Parliament, by pointing out the recent incorporation of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child into Scots law. The UK Government have since threatened to overturn the unanimous vote by the Scottish Parliament.

<https://twitter.com/theSNP/status/1376474706526797828?s=20>

This is what she said:

“Friends,

Just as we have done so often in the past year, people in Scotland came together last week in a spirit of solidarity and compassion, to remember all those who have lost their lives to Covid.

Since the start of the pandemic, I've been determined never to allow the daily reporting of the numbers of Covid cases, hospitalisations and deaths to be or to feel routine.

It is instead a very real and heart-breaking reminder of the human cost of this dreadful virus.

The past 12 months have been tougher than most of us have ever known.

And the crisis is not yet over.

Covid is down – and we have much more reason now to be hopeful for the future – but Covid is not yet out.

We must continue to work together to keep it under control.

I know how hard this is – for young people, for businesses, for those living and working in care homes and for countless others across the country.

But the sacrifices we are all making – each and every day – are saving lives.

So I want to thank everyone in Scotland for everything you have done over this past year.

It is only because of your sacrifices and your actions, alongside the incredible work of our NHS and care workers, brilliant scientists and everyone involved in delivering the vaccination programme, that we can look forward now, with some optimism, to better times ahead.

You know, when I became First Minister I could never have imagined leading Scotland through a crisis like this.

The last year has tested me on so many levels – as I know it has everyone else.

It has made me reflect on what really matters in life – and on what matters in politics and political leadership too.

I know I will never again take for granted being able to hug my mum and dad, or seeing my niece and nephews on their birthdays, or just the simple pleasure of catching up with a friend for a chat.

And in politics, things that once seemed desperately important

feel so much less so now.

I don't have much time these days for the "who's up/who's down" approach to politics.

And I definitely have much less patience for those who treat politics like a game – and for indulging anyone who puts self interest ahead of the country's best interests.

If the last year has taught us anything it's that politics is about improving people's lives or it is about nothing at all.

And that takes purpose and hard work.

The pandemic has also – for me – reinforced some fundamental principles of leadership.

It's important to always treat people like adults.

And to lead like a grown-up too.

Don't pretend to be infallible.

Learn from mistakes, don't deny them.

And, in tough times especially, understand that experience matters.

I – and the SNP government – have worked each and every day to lead Scotland through the pandemic.

We will continue to do so throughout this campaign and – with your permission – beyond it too.

In this election I am asking you to re-elect me as First Minister – to lead us through and out of this crisis, and then onto recovery.

We must focus – first and foremost – on the difficult decisions that are still needed to make sure we don't give Covid the upper hand again.

We have come too far to slip back again – so we must not take our eye off the ball.

But this campaign is also an opportunity to think about, and debate, the kind of country we want to build after the pandemic.

In Scotland, despite the political sound and fury that so often dominates our discourse – I suspect there is quite substantial agreement about the kind of nation we want to be.

A fairer country, founded on the values of compassion and love, with an economy that is strong and works for everyone, and an equal partnership with our friends in the rest of the UK and across Europe.

That kind of consensus is not unusual in northern European countries like ours – countries that value a fair, equal society and a strong community-driven ethos.

In fact, that sense of community and solidarity is a great inbuilt advantage as we look to rebuild for the future.

But what is unusual is that despite people across Scotland wanting, and indeed voting for, measures to bring about that kind of country – another government, the Westminster government, controlled by a Tory party Scotland hasn't voted for in 60 years, so often pulls us in a different direction.

We have seen and continue to see the effects of that.

People in Scotland rejected austerity cuts. But they were imposed on us anyway.

We voted to stay in the European Union. But we were forced out.

We want a fair society. But Westminster is taking money away from those who can least afford it.

We value and have benefited from devolution and self-government. But Westminster has launched a power grab on the Scottish Parliament.

Let me set out just one recent instance of the UK Government muscling in on the Scottish Parliament.

It is an example that demonstrates our different priorities and values – and illustrates the choice of two futures we face.

Two weeks ago, the Scottish Parliament unanimously passed landmark legislation to incorporate the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child into domestic law.

It was a proud moment not just for our Parliament, but for our country.

I had hoped that the Tory government might follow our lead – and ensure children's rights would be protected and enhanced right across the UK.

But not only did they refuse to follow our lead – they actually sent us a letter threatening to go to court to strike down our new law, and overturn the unanimous vote of the Scottish Parliament.

What bothered them was that this Bill could constrain the powers of the UK Government over Scotland.

And on the day that the Scottish Parliament was acting to protect children's rights – what do you think Boris Johnson was doing?

He was setting out plans to go on a nuclear weapons spending spree – to massively increase the number of nuclear warheads the UK has.

Weapons that could wipe out swathes of civilisation at a stroke are not just immoral – they represent an obscene waste

of money.

Friends,

Never has the “bairns not bombs” argument been made so stark.

The priorities of this Tory government are all wrong.

So the message is this: if you want to put children’s rights before nuclear weapons – vote SNP.

Friends,

There is a question all of us in Scotland need to ask ourselves.

Who is best placed to decide and shape the kind of country we want to be after the pandemic – the people of Scotland and governments, of whatever party, elected by us; or Westminster governments and politicians like Boris Johnson?

I believe Scotland’s recovery should be in Scotland’s hands.

Independence is not a distraction from recovery.

It is essential to secure a recovery that is made here in Scotland and based on the values the majority of us subscribe to.

In an independent Scotland we will have the powers and tools we need to build the country so many of us want to see.

Never again will it be possible for a Westminster government to take Scotland in the wrong direction.

A vote for the SNP in this election is a vote to re-elect me and the SNP Government to continue to lead Scotland safely through the pandemic.

But it is also a vote for your right – when the crisis is over – to choose independence.

And we can help build the case for independence every day in how we use the powers we already have.

In all circumstances, my number one priority – our national mission – has been and will continue to be protecting Scotland and keeping people safe.

In that national mission I am in awe of all the staff in our wonderful NHS.

You know, Boris Johnson apparently told his Tory MPs that the success of the vaccination roll-out is down to “greed.”

I couldn't disagree more.

The success of the vaccination programme is not down to greed – it is down to the brilliance of our scientists and the magnificence of our National Health Service.

The NHS keeps all of us safe.

So in return the SNP will keep the NHS safe.

To achieve that we need to do two things:

Firstly, in government, we will continue to invest in staff and services for the benefit of patients now and in the future.

At the heart of the NHS are the dedicated people who work in it and care for us.

We will be forever in their debt for their extraordinary service in this hardest of years.

That's why we recognized their work with a £500 thank-you bonus.

And when I saw Boris Johnson offering just a one per cent pay rise I knew we had to do better here in Scotland.

So we have offered the biggest single increase in NHS pay in the history of devolution.

It will mean, for example, that a nurse at the top of Band 5 of the Agenda for Change pay scale will be over £1,300 better off after tax than a counterpart in England.

Our NHS workers are extraordinary people and in this most extraordinary of years, this is a way of showing our collective appreciation.

And over the coming weeks we will set out further plans to:

- recruit more staff.
- bring down waiting times
- open more elective care centres
- invest in mental health services.
- set up a National Care Service
- and invest £250 million to tackle the drugs death emergency.

I can also announce today that as part of our Cancer Recovery Plan, a re-elected SNP government will establish at least one new fast track cancer diagnostic centre in every health board area

Throughout our time in government, the SNP has protected and extended the right to free health care.

South of the border we see a different situation.

Not just a miserly pay offer but concerns over marketization and creeping privatization.

And that brings me to the second task ahead of us if we are to keep Scotland's NHS safe – putting Scotland's future in Scotland's hands and becoming an independent country.

Leaving our future in Westminster's hands would be a massive gamble.

Take the issue of funding.



Boris Johnson has made it clear what he thinks of the way we do things in Scotland.

In the past, he has accused us of “free-riding” on tax-payers south of the border.

He has said it is “monstrous” that we have free personal care.

And he said a pound spent in Croydon is of far more value than a pound spent in Strathclyde.

Many of his band of Brexiteers are on record with similar views.

Now, because of the strength of the SNP the Tories probably think they wouldn't get away with cutting Scotland's share of UK spending.

But I'm pretty sure that's what they would like to do.

Of course, even without that direct assault, the economic hit from Brexit will take its toll.

Compared with EU membership, Brexit, and in particular the hard Brexit the Tories have imposed on us, will make us poorer and put pressure on budgets for some time to come.

And it's not just funding that should have us on our guard.

The UK Government has stripped from its Trade Bill a clause that would have prevented any post-Brexit deals from undermining “a comprehensive publicly funded health service free at the point of delivery”.

And as part of their power grab on the Scottish Parliament, they've given themselves the right to subject Scotland's NHS to what they call “market access” principles, whatever the people of Scotland or the Scottish Parliament think.

Friends,

Independence is, in essence, about democracy. It is about making sure we get the governments we vote for.

But it is about so much more than that.

It's about having the powers to improve lives.

It's about guaranteeing our publicly run, publicly funded NHS.

And as we look ahead to better times, it's about putting Scotland's recovery from Covid in Scotland's hands.

Let me set out what a recovery made in Scotland, led by the SNP will look like – and ask you then to imagine how much more we could do if all the powers that currently lie with Boris Johnson were in the hands of our own Scottish Parliament.

Just as with the NHS, we intend to build a recovery based on investment in people.

We will invest an additional £500 million over the next parliament to create new opportunities and reskill people for the jobs of the future.

The pandemic has been tough for everyone.

But for many young people getting ready to make their own way in life I know it has been particularly hard.

I am determined that they will not lose out on the opportunities that should be theirs by right.

So our Young Person's Guarantee will ensure that everyone aged between 16 and 24 has the opportunity to go to university or college, get a place on an apprenticeship, training or work experience programme, secure a job or take part in a formal volunteering programme.

Our young people are Scotland's future and the SNP will always stand up for them.

And let me promise this too – for as long as the SNP is in government, there will be no university tuition fees. Education will remain a right based on the ability to learn, not the ability to pay.

Over this campaign we will also set out plans to become a net zero country by 2045.

We'll support 14,000 jobs a year by delivering 100,000 affordable homes.

And we'll help our creative and cultural sector, digital businesses, tourism and other industries.

But in all this – unless we choose a different path – we will be hampered by a hard Brexit that we didn't vote for.

Brexit is already causing deep damage and it will continue to hit the economy and jobs hard.

To be removed from the European Single Market – which is seven times the size of the UK – in the middle of a pandemic was an act of economic vandalism.

And no party which supports that economic sabotage has any right to claim they are putting the recovery first.

A recovery made in Scotland will be one which puts Scotland's economy first.

It will be a recovery not back to the way things were before – but to a clean, green, wellbeing economy that works for everyone.

Scotland is one of the wealthiest countries in the world – but for too many people it doesn't feel that way.

Too many people and families are struggling just to get by.

So in government we've taken action.

Last year we spent nearly £2 billion to support low income households.

We're getting cash directly to people who need it most in these most difficult of times.

If we are re-elected in May, lunches and breakfasts will be available free of charge all year round for every primary school child in Scotland.

And we are the only part of the UK to give low income families an extra £10 per week for every child – initially for children up to age 6.

The Scottish Child Payment has been described as a game changer in the fight to end child poverty.

We have already committed to extending the payment to all children under the age of 16 in low income families.

It will take us to the end of next year to get the systems in place to make these payments in four weekly instalments to everyone who is eligible.

But we know the pandemic will continue to cause financial hardship before then.

So I can announce today that we will make bridging payments.

We will provide the equivalent of the Scottish Child Payment to all low income families with children in receipt of free school meals until the benefit is introduced in full.

That will mean £520 will be paid in quarterly payments this year.

And the same amount – £520 – will be paid in 2022.

This will reach around 170,000 children and help lift more children out of poverty.

But friends, I can announce today that we will go further.

I want to make ending child poverty a driving mission for the next Parliament.

So I can confirm that if we are re-elected on May 6, we will – over the course of the next term – increase the Scottish Child Payment from £10 per week for each eligible child to £20 per week.

It's time to end the scandal of child poverty and this will help do it.

It is a downpayment on what will be possible when we have the full powers over tax and social security that only independence can deliver.

These and other measures are about offering practical help.

But they also speak to the kind of country we are.

A country where we look out for each other in a spirit of solidarity and togetherness.

In this campaign our message will be one of optimism and hope for the future.

As we emerge from the trauma of this pandemic, we do have much to be optimistic about.

We are a country blessed with extraordinary resources.

We are a powerhouse in renewable energy.

Our food and drink industry is renowned the world over for its quality.

We have an industrial heritage second to none and we are now leading the way in advanced manufacturing.

We are at the cutting edge of the industries of the future –

from life sciences to satellites.

We have some of the world's finest universities.

We can see the success of other independent European countries of our size.

They are among the wealthiest, fairest and happiest in the world.

If they can do it – then with all our resources and talent, why not Scotland?

Above everything, that sense of optimism and possibility is founded on the abilities of the people who live here.

We are no better or worse than anyone else but nobody cares more about Scotland and nobody will do a better job of building the country we know is possible than the people who live here.

That's why I believe people in Scotland have the right to decide their own future in an independence referendum, when this current crisis has passed.

So that Scotland's recovery will be in Scotland's hands.

So we can build the Scotland that we know we can be – a country of compassion, equality and love.

The SNP is ready to put our case to the country: a case that is based on our absolute belief that the best people to take Scotland forward are the people who live here.

So my message in this vital election – given the times we are living through, perhaps the most important election in our country's history – is this:

For the strong, experienced leadership that the country needs at this time of crisis;

For a bold, progressive, ambitious policy programme to kickstart our recovery from Covid;

And to secure the right to choose our independence;

Vote to re-elect me as your First Minister and the SNP as your government.

Give us the mandate we need to get things done.

I am asking you to cast both votes for the SNP on May 6th.

And, together, let's get on with the job of building a country to be proud of."