

# Resignation of First Minister leaves a political vacuum

**The First Minister of Scotland, Nicola Sturgeon, has announced her intention to resign.**

She said to members of the press in her resignation speech at Bute House: "Sorry to break into your half term break. Being First Minister in my unbiased opinion is the best job in the world and a privilege beyond measure.

"Since my first moments in the job, I have believed that part of serving well would be to know – almost instinctively – when the time is right to make way for someone else. And when that time comes, to have the courage to do so.

"In my head and my heart I know that time is now.

"Today I am announcing my intention to step down as leader of the SNP and First Minister."

The First Minister said she will remain in office until her successor is elected. There is already speculation about the Finance Secretary, Kate Forbes or Angus Robertson who is also in the Cabinet. The timetable will be announced by the SNP shortly.

Keith Brown Depute Leader of the SNP said on Twitter: "An outstanding Leader. The first female and longest serving First Minister. Nicola Sturgeon has given her working life to the cause of independence. Thank you for all you have done, and will do in our campaign to win independence for Scotland."



Nicola Sturgeon speaking to a virtual session of parliament on Tuesday 3 August 2022 PHOTO courtesy of The Scottish Government

Ms Sturgeon explained: “First this decision is not a reaction to short term pressures. I have spent almost three decades in front line politics. If this was just a question of resilience or ability then I would not be standing here today. It may seem sudden, but I have been wrestling with the decision for a few weeks.

“Especially as First Minister, the job is relentless. I do not expect violins, but I am a human being as well as a politician.

“Giving absolutely everything in this job is the only way to do it. In truth that can only be done for so long. A First Minister is never off duty. The nature of modern political

discourse brings a brutality, and it takes its toll on you and those around you.

“Leading the country through the pandemic was the toughest thing I have done. It is only recently that I started to comprehend the physical and mental impact on me. Can I give this job everything it deserves for the rest of the parliamentary term the answer is no.

“I have a duty to say so now. In a particular sense I feel that duty to my party too.”

She described the UK Supreme Court decision as a “democratic outrage” and outlined a couple of further reflections which have affected her decision.

She said: “I have confidence in the SNP to choose someone new. We are by far the most successful party, and firmly on course to win the next election.”

But she also conceded that fixed opinions can result from a leader being in office for a long time.

She said: “We must reach across the divide in Scottish politics.”

She also said that a new leader would not be subject to the polarised opinions which she may have come to represent.

Ms Sturgeon said: “I feel more and more that the fixed opinions people who have about me are barriers to reasoned debate in this country.

“Issues which are controversial become irrational – and are not discussed on their own merits but through the prism of what people think about me.”

She suggested that all parties might take this opportunity to depolarise the political debate, and that her decision might prove to be good for Scottish politics.

But she confirmed she is going to champion two main issues from the backbenches – The Promise – (in 2020, Scotland made a promise: that by 2030, care experienced children and young people will be able to grow up safe, loved and respected, and be supported to stay with their families where that’s possible.) and of course independence.

She continued: “I have dedicated a lifetime to this and believe in with every fibre of my being. I intend being there when the country achieves independence.

“Yesterday I attended the funeral of an independence activist, Allan Angus, and it was during that service I came to my decision 100%.”



The new Baby Box design, created by a team of children and young people, has been unveiled. The new design features iconic landmarks such as Ben Nevis, Glenfinnan Viaduct and Edinburgh Castle. The winning team received an award from Children’s Minister Maree Todd at the APS distribution centre in Leith where the boxes are printed, filled and sent out to expectant parents.

The First Minister said that Scotland has changed in so many ways since 2014 – many for the better, and suggested that Scotland is fairer than it was in 2014 with policies including the increased university opportunities for those from areas of deprivation, the Baby Box, paid-for childcare and stronger protections for those affected by domestic abuse.

She said that there would be time to say thank you to a long list of people but she thanked her husband and family, saying: “Mine have been my rock throughout.”

**Finally she said that of her and the party’s record: “Eight emphatic election victories in eight years ain’t bad.”**

The UK Supreme Court ruled against Scotland being able to hold an independence referendum without consent of the UK, and the First Minister had said she would fight the next general election on one single matter – turning the election into a de facto referendum. Of course, there have been dissenting voices to such a plan and it will be discussed at the special party conference next month. She outlined how hard it would be to lead the party forward from that conference, knowing that she was considering her own future as leader.

**Lifelong                    campaigner                    for  
independence**

Nicola Sturgeon has fought the independence cause since she was a teenager. She joined the SNP a number of years before she was elected as a member of the Scottish Parliament in 1999 and became the first female First Minister in 2004.

She has been in the Scottish Cabinet for 16 years since Alex

Salmond appointed her as his Deputy First Minister and Health Secretary. As Health Secretary Ms Sturgeon led the way on policies such as the scrapping of prescription charges. She subsequently held positions as Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure, Capital Investment and Cities and oversaw the process for the 2014 independence referendum.

Following Salmond's resignation Ms Sturgeon led the SNP in the 2015 general election when the SNP returned 56 Scottish MPs to Westminster replacing the Liberal Democrats as the third largest party in the House of Commons. Since 2016 the SNP has not held a simple majority at Holyrood, but with the more recent alliance with the Green Party there was a majority to be had at important moments.

One of these was the legislation before Christmas to introduce the Gender Recognition Reform Bill (GRRB) which was passed with a majority of 86 to 39.

Most recently the UK Government used Section 35 of the Scotland Act for the very first time to overturn the GRRB, stopping it from gaining Royal Assent and becoming law.

During the pandemic, hers was a voice of assuredness and resolve, and even after the daily briefings stopped the SNP star was in the ascendant in poll after poll. There was one misstep when the First Minister was observed speaking to people in a pub without a mask, but certainly no parties held at Bute House which was closed for the duration.



Scottish Labour leader, Anas Sarwar PHOTO ©2022 The Edinburgh Reporter

**Scottish Labour leader Anas Sarwar said:** “Nicola Sturgeon has led Scotland through some of the most challenging times in our history.

“It is right that today we pay tribute to those achievements, particularly during the pandemic.

“Regardless of our differences, she is an able politician who has stood at the forefront of Scottish politics for more than 20 years. On a human level that is worthy of respect and thanks.

“To lead your country for almost a decade is a political achievement that secures her place in history.

“While we have disagreed passionately about what is best for our people, I have never for a moment doubted her passion for

Scotland.

“All too often it is easy to forget that those on the frontline of our politics carry a heavy burden – not only for themselves but for their friends and families.

“I – and my entire party – wish her the best in whatever she does next.

“But our country, now more than ever, requires a politics focussed on delivering the change Scotland needs – by uniting Scotland and not dividing it.

“It is clear that Scotland needs new ideas and new passion to make our country the best place to grow up and grow old in.

“Labour will aspire to win the confidence of the public – and be the change that Scotland needs.”

The Co-Conveners of the Scottish Greens, Patrick Harvie and Lorna Slater issued a statement saying: “The First Minister was at the helm in developing the Bute House Agreement between the Scottish Government and the Scottish Greens. The agreement was a historic moment in Scottish politics and was endorsed overwhelmingly by Scottish Green and SNP members.

“We look forward to continuing to deliver on our shared ambition for a greener, fairer Scotland, both in the immediate future and with a new First Minister in place.”

The Secretary of State for Scotland, Alister Jack, said: “Nicola Sturgeon has been a formidable politician and I thank her for her service as First Minister for eight years. I particularly appreciate the work that she undertook to help us deliver two new Freeports in Scotland, bringing thousands of jobs and millions of pounds of investment.

“A new First Minister will have a real chance to re-focus The Scottish Government on what they were elected to do – improve public services such as health and education that people rely



on and that are vital to Scotland's future success.

"Her resignation presents a welcome opportunity for the Scottish Government to change course, and to drop its divisive obsession with independence.

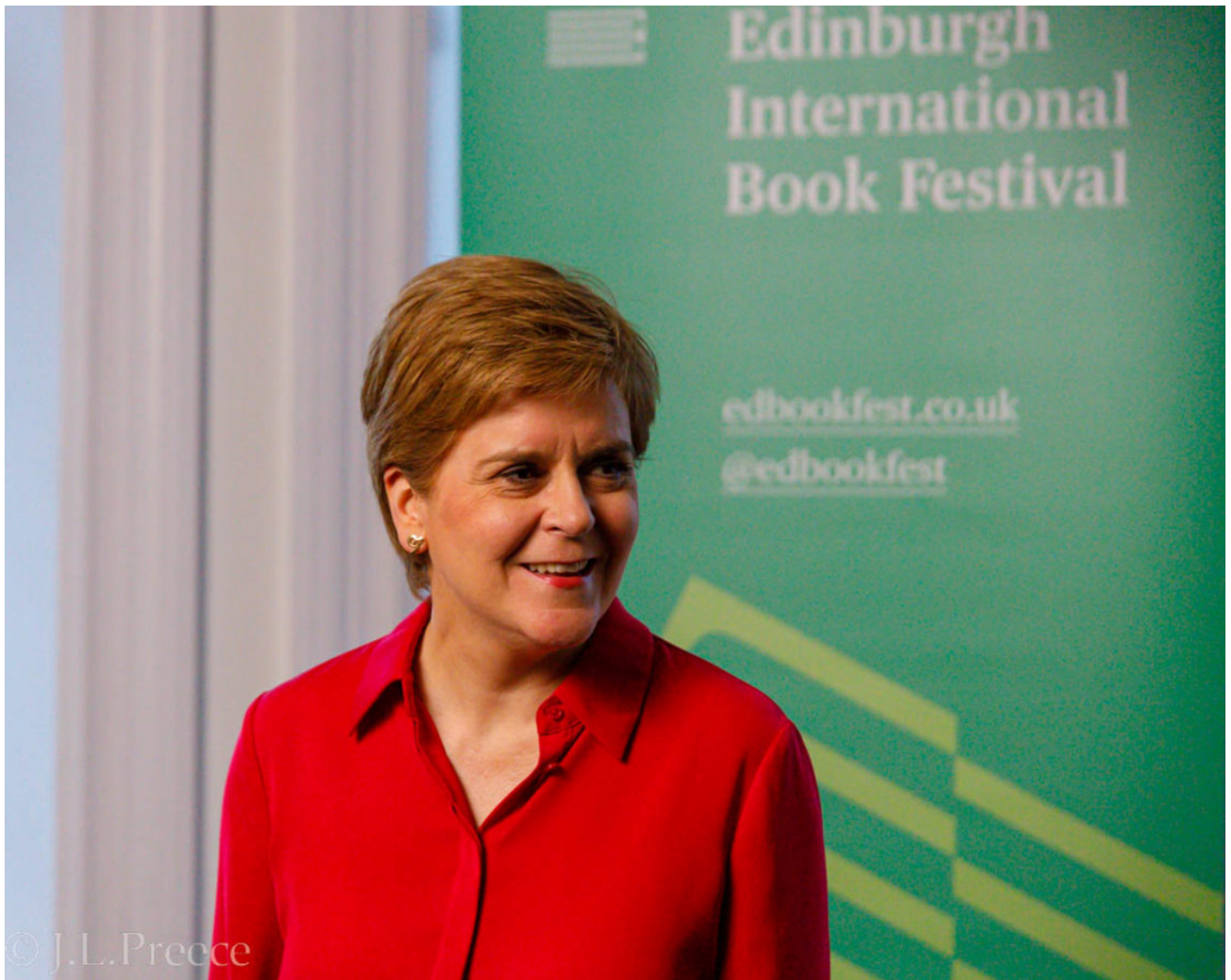
"I want to see a Scottish Government that works hand in hand with the UK Government to realise our full potential as a country."

**UNISON Scotland regional secretary, Tracey Dalling said:**

"Nicola Sturgeon is a huge figure in Scottish politics – a constant presence over eight years including leading us through a pandemic. She has made a massive contribution to our country. I wish her all the best in whatever she chooses to do next.

"Scotland's next First Minister must continue to develop the Scottish government's constructive relationship with UNISON, that she built. We regularly disagreed but we respected that UNISON could talk through our differences with her and her ministers.

"Her resignation is an opportunity to rethink public services in Scotland. Our next First Minister needs to deal with the NHS staffing crisis and reduce the worst waiting times since devolution, withdraw the National Care Service Bill which will not improve social care, invest in a grown-up relationship with local government and return it to being a key deliverer of public services, close the education gap and invest in public services across Scotland."



FM Nicola Sturgeon MSP – Edinburgh International Book Festival  
– Day 17, Edinburgh School of Art, 29th Aug 2022  
© 2022 J.L. Preece



Nicola Sturgeon joined Angus Robertson on the campaign trail in Edinburgh's New Town 20 April 2021 ©2021 The Edinburgh Reporter