

Letter from Scotland

My local community centre held a “spring clean day” this week when we all turned out to tidy away the winter’s baggage, clean and re-paint the place and prepare for Easter and the summer.

It was also a chance to refresh our mission and our energies.

The same is happening on a grander scalespring has arrived, the rising sun pushes our clocks forward an hour this weekend and we enter a new political season. Nicola Sturgeon bowed out gracefully as [First Minister](#) on Thursday with an emotional farewell to parliament and people.

“It has been the privilege of my lifetime to serve as first minister of Scotland,” she said, her voice breaking. She admitted that she’d made her “fair share of mistakes,” but listed her achievements – extra child care payments, a more progressive tax system, closing the attainment gap in schools, minimum pricing for alcohol, free prescriptions, a national investment bank, action on climate change.



A thousand flowers bloom for the great leap forward into spring.

She said, above all, her time in office has been defined by the Covid pandemic and there is almost universal agreement that she handled the crisis far better than the shambles at Westminster. But her real political success has been in winning elections, eight in a row, giving her eight years as first minister and a career in front line politics spanning 24 years, 16 of them as a government minister.

What she hasn't done, of course, is change the nation's opinion on independence. It's still divided right down the middle, as it was at the time of the referendum in 2014. And perhaps it's that frustration that has led her to resign. Rather wearily she told parliament: "I know in my heart it's time to go, to have a little space for Nicola Sturgeon as a person." But she promised to continue the fight for independence, climate justice and gender equality.



Ash Regan MSP



Humza Yousaf MSP



Kate Forbes MSP

So when the ballot papers of the SNP's 72,000 members are opened on Monday, we will learn who will take the party, and the nation, into its new season. We will have the so-called "continuity" candidate Humza Yousaf, or the right wing gradualist Kate Forbes or the left-wing independence-soon candidate Ash Regan. They will have a tough job following in the sure footsteps of the most talented politician Scotland has produced in a generation.

One of the last duties Nicola Sturgeon had to perform as first minister was to make an official apology to the victims of the child adoption system in the 1950s, 60s and 70s. Some 60,000 unmarried mothers had their babies taken from them for adoption under the social, economic and moral precepts of the times. Ms Sturgeon said that while many children were cared for by loving families, some were abused and the young mothers involved were often treated shamefully. "It is the stuff of nightmares," she said. "To the families who have lived with

the legacy, for the decades of pain they have suffered, I offer a sincere, heart-felt and unreserved apology.”



First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon MSP makes a statement to Parliament apologising for Historical Adoption Practices in Scotland where many young women were forced to give their babies up for adoption against their will. 22 March 2023 . Pic – Andrew Cowan/Scottish Parliament

Scotland is the first of the UK nations to make such an apology and it comes at a time when we are unearthing and repenting for the many sins of our past.....witch hunting, slavery, child abuse in our institutions, the export of child immigrants to Canada and Australia.

Allowing climate change is one of our sins of the present, for which we will no doubt have to apologise to our grandchildren. But at least one of our energy companies is trying to do something about it. SSE this week announced £100 million of investment in the hydro-storage scheme proposed for Coire Glas. The Scottish and UK governments are hoping to assemble the £1.5 billion required to build a reservoir the

hills north of Fort William. This would hold water, pumped up into it by wind power, to provide hydro-electricity when the wind isn't blowing.



Major incident at Leith Imperial Dry Dock as ship RV Petrel owned by Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen is on its side an air ambulance is on the scene. PHOTO Alan Simpson Photography

The wind was blowing hard on Wednesday morning when the research ship "Petrel" slipped from its supports in a dry dock in Leith and injured 33 workers, six of them seriously. A major incident was declared, there was a large turnout of emergency services and three local hospitals were called into action to deal with the casualties. The 76m long Petrel, now lying precariously on its side, was once owned by Paul Allen, the co-founder of Microsoft who used it for his hobby of searching for shipwrecks. It was bought by the US Navy in 2022 for its "Expeditionary War Centre" and was in the dry dock in Leith for repairs. Needless to say there is an investigation going on to find out what happened.

Such accidents test our systems of response, and the emergency

services certainly responded well on this occasion. But more generally, it would be nice to know we were living in an efficient and caring society. Luckily there are experts looking into this and publishing a "World Happiness Report" each year. It measures things like income, social support, health, freedom, generosity and absence of corruption. The UK only just scrapes into the top 20 countries, at number 19. Finland comes first for the sixth year in a row. Now there's a target for the new first minister and our new season of government.