

**SCOTLAND — INDEPENDENCE**

*Statement*

**HON LORNA HARPER (East Metropolitan)** [5.31 pm]: Sorry, I am having technical issues and throat issues! As many members may have seen, yesterday Nicola Sturgeon, the First Minister of Scotland, resigned. She said it was the best move for the Scottish independence movement, but also that the “brutality” of politics had taken its toll on her. Nicola Sturgeon grew up not far from me in Scotland. I had a look. She grew up in a town called Irvine on the Ayrshire coast. It is actually only 20 miles from where I grew up, which made me laugh because that is closer than the distance I drive home every night to Ellenbrook. Anyway, I digress. We are about the same age as well. She has been campaigning for Scottish independence since she was a teenager in the 1980s. It was Margaret Thatcher, Conservative Party Prime Minister throughout that turbulent decade, who had pushed her into politics. It was Margaret Thatcher who awakened me to detest the Conservative Party and pushed me to stand up and speak out. During that time, Scotland was bleak, with dying industry and fading spirit. Thatcher had created a sense of hopelessness by presiding over the decline of coal, steel and shipbuilding, which was the heart-blood of Scotland at the time. Back then, it was not the pro-independence Scottish National Party that dominated Scottish politics, but the Labour Party that had a strong power base. That helped to propel Tony Blair and Gordon Brown into Downing Street, which then delivered the devolution of powers to Scotland.

In September 2014, some members may remember that a referendum was held in Scotland. Unfortunately, Scotland voted to remain in the union by 55 per cent to 45 per cent. That was after a massive scare campaign by the Tory party. They told pensioners that they would lose their pensions in Scotland if they did not remain. Pensioners freaked out, of course, and they all voted to stay. Subsequently, in 2015, the SNP swept almost all before it, securing 56 of the 59 Scottish seats at Westminster. It annihilated Labour because Labour supported the Tories and the English. My brother is a staunch Labour Party member in Scotland and he is dancing up and down, enjoying the fact that Nicola Sturgeon has gone. This is a discussion we will not have any more. I cannot vote over there, but we do not talk about it. Then came Brexit; we love Brexit. Scotland voted to remain by 62 per cent to 38 per cent. They wanted to stay in Europe but, unfortunately, they had to leave because the English voted to get out.

Nicola Sturgeon spent seven and a half years as the Leader of the Scottish National Party and First Minister of Scotland, and I thought it would be appropriate to talk about her achievements in Scotland as the female leader of a small country. I will just list some of them because if I had to list them all, we would still be here tomorrow, even though I could talk until tomorrow if I had time.

Scottish students receive university tuition for free. Scottish parents receive 1 140 hours of free, high-quality child care. Prescriptions are free; there are no prescription charges in Scotland. Scotland has free period products; anyone in Scotland is entitled to go to a school, council building, doctor’s office or hospital and be supplied with free period products without comment. Scotland has free bus travel, not just for the over 60s and those who have a disability card, but for everyone under the age of 22 years. Free school meals are offered to all children in primary 1 to primary 3. Everyone under the age of 26 years has free National Health Service dental care. Parking charges have been removed at all National Health Service hospitals, and the government invested over £9 million in Scotland’s rail infrastructure. Over 96 per cent of Scotland’s gross electricity consumption comes from renewables. There is no fracking, and that includes in the North Sea. The government allocated £1 billion for warmer and more energy-efficient homes; it is investing in houses to try to reduce the loss of heat in winter.

Scotland introduced a world-leading domestic abuse act, with legislation that makes psychological domestic abuse and controlling behaviour a crime. It allocated record funding of £15 million to support anti-sectarian education, to tackle sectarianism in schools, prisons, workplaces and communities. For those who are unaware, sectarianism is how there is Catholic Scotland and Protestant Scotland, and never the twain shall meet. It is a huge problem over there. Residents in areas of the Scottish Highlands and islands have cheaper airfares. Voting franchise has been expanded to 16-year-olds and 17-year-olds; I will not comment about that. They have a gender-balanced cabinet. Scottish Water is in public hands.

Nicola Sturgeon has tackled violence against women and girls. The only thing Nicola Sturgeon has not been able to do is bring about a free Scotland, but that is one of the reasons she is stepping down. She says that, for the benefit of the movement, it is time for some new blood, new faces and new people to step up. She has been worn down by the critics and the mansplaining—the usual stuff you get in politics. Although she is not on the same wavelength of politics that I am, I commend her for the social movements that she put forward, and that is only the tip of the iceberg of what she has done.