

News story: 2019 New Year Message from Secretary of State for Scotland

I'm not going to pretend that 2018 has been an easy year. In Scotland and across the UK, the past 12 months have brought home the difficulties of leaving the EU. Brexit has amplified divisions – between political parties, within political parties and outside politics too.

The people I meet in Scotland simply want Brexit sorted. I understand that. I agree with them that we need to move on to the many other things that matter to us in our daily lives.

For that to happen, 2019 must be a year of compromise and pragmatism. It must be a year when we set aside divisions and work together for the good of the country. Even after a tough 2018, I'm confident that can happen.

We can leave the EU, respecting the result of the 2016 referendum and the votes of 17.4 million people across the UK, and we can do so in a way that protects jobs, supports business and allows us all to get on with our lives.

The Prime Minister has negotiated a deal with the other EU member states that delivers on all of that. We can leave in an orderly way, with a transition period that will allow us to finalise our future arrangements with the EU, wave goodbye to the despised Common Fisheries Policy and begin to strengthen our trading relationships with the rest of the world.

But we will all need to summon the spirit of compromise. As we enter the final three months before we leave the EU, the time has passed for politicians seeking to use Brexit to bring about a General Election or an unwanted second independence referendum.

The last thing we need, the last thing the country needs, is more division. Instead, we should be the crossing the 't' and dotting the 'i' of Brexit, then moving onto focus on other issues.

Scotland's economic performance continues to lag behind that of the UK as a whole. Both Scotland's governments must work together to address the challenges we face. That's why, in 2019, my priorities will be jobs and prosperity in Scotland. We will soon have new growth deals covering Ayrshire, Borderlands and Moray, on top of the more than £1 billion the UK Government has already committed to economic regeneration in and around Scotland's seven cities.

And like everyone else in Scotland, I want to see the Scottish Government getting to grips with our struggling NHS, our under-performing schools and our woeful rail network. What I do not want is to see Nicola Sturgeon expending all her energy trying to use Brexit to campaign for a second independence referendum. That issue was settled decisively in 2014.

So I say, let's work together. In 2019, let's finish the job of leaving the

EU and refocus so we can make real progress on the things that matter to us all. I know we can do it.