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Scottish Parliament

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[The Presiding Officer opened the meeting at 11:00]

One Minute's Silence

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): Good morning, colleagues. We meet today in unplanned, unexpected and rather sad circumstances to debate a motion of condolence following the death of His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh. In a moment, I will ask the First Minister and the party leaders to lead us in their contributions. Before that, I ask you all to stand and join me in one minute's silence.

Motion of Condolence

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): I invite the First Minister to speak to and move the motion of condolence.

11:02

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): The tributes paid to the Duke of Edinburgh over the past three days show the affection in which he was held here in Scotland, across the United Kingdom and, indeed, around the world. On behalf of the people of Scotland, I express my deepest sympathy to Her Majesty the Queen, who is grieving the loss of her "strength and stay"—her husband of almost 74 years—and to the duke's children and the wider royal family.

Of course, before he became the public figure so familiar to all of us today, the Duke of Edinburgh had already led a life of distinction. Like so many of his generation, he endured difficulties and faced dangers that generations since can barely comprehend. As a naval officer in world war two, he was mentioned in dispatches for his part in the battle of Matapan. In 1943, his courage and quick thinking helped to save HMS Wallace from attack in the Mediterranean. During a two-year spell at Rosyth, he was responsible for escorting merchant vessels on a route that was known as "E-boat alley" because of the frequency of the attacks from German vessels.

For those contributions alone, he—like all veterans—is owed a significant debt of gratitude. The second world war was, however, just the start of the Duke of Edinburgh's life of public service.

From 1947, he was the Queen's constant companion, and from 1952 he was her consort. As has been much noted in recent days, he became the longest-serving consort in British history. That role in a constitutional monarchy cannot be an easy one—particularly, perhaps, for someone who is spirited and energetic by temperament.

Of course, he faced the additional challenge of being the husband of a powerful woman at a time when that was even more of an exception than it is today. That reversal of the more traditional dynamic was highly unusual in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s—and even now it is not as common as it might be. Yet the Duke of Edinburgh was devoted to supporting the Queen. They were a partnership.

Like First Ministers before me, I got to witness the strength of that partnership at close quarters during annual stays at Balmoral. I always enjoyed my conversations with the Duke of Edinburgh on those visits—as, indeed, I did on all the occasions that I met him—and I was struck by how different

he was in private from the way that he was sometimes characterised in public. He was a thoughtful man, deeply interesting and fiercely intelligent. He was a serious bookworm, which I am, too, so talking about the books that we were reading was often, for me, a highlight of our conversations.

Prince Philip was, without doubt, a devoted consort to the Queen, but he also carved out a distinctive individual role. He took a particular interest in industry and science, and he was far sighted in his early support for conservation. As far back as 1969, in a speech here in Edinburgh, he warned of the risks of “virtually indestructible plastics”. In 1956, he founded the Duke of Edinburgh’s award scheme, which now provides opportunity, hope and inspiration every year to more than 1 million young people in more than 100 countries around the world. In addition, the Duke of Edinburgh was patron of more than 800 charities. At the time of his retirement from royal duties, he had completed well over 20,000 engagements, many of which were here in Scotland—a country that he loved from an early age.

The Duke of Edinburgh was educated in Moray, was taught to sail by a Scottish trawler skipper and was, as I mentioned, based at Rosyth for two years during the war. When the duke received the freedom of the city of Edinburgh, in 1949, he spoke of the “numberless benefits” that Scotland had given him. Some of his first duties with the royal household were undertaken here. In July 1947, just a week after the announcement of his engagement to the then Princess Elizabeth, the couple travelled to Edinburgh. In the years since, the duke was present at many of the key moments of our modern history, including, of course, the official openings of the Scottish Parliament. He served many Scottish charities and organisations—indeed, he was the chancellor of the University of Edinburgh for more than 50 years. Throughout all that time, the public held him in great affection.

On his first royal visit to Edinburgh, in 1947, people gathered just across the street, in the forecourt of Holyrood palace, and celebrated the royal engagement with country dancing. More than 70 years later, shortly after he announced his retirement from public life, I witnessed the warmth of the reception that he received as he accompanied the Queen to the opening of the Queensferry crossing. It was an event that he had been determined to attend, because he was fascinated and deeply impressed by the feats of engineering that the three Forth bridges represent.

One of the Duke of Edinburgh’s early engagements in Scotland, shortly after the Queen’s coronation, was to plant a cherry tree in

the grounds of Canongate kirk, which is just across the road from here. The tree stands directly opposite the tree that had been planted by the Queen a year previously. The trees are just about to bloom—as, I am sure, they will do each spring for decades to come. I am equally sure that, not just in the weeks ahead but many years from now, people will think fondly of the Duke of Edinburgh as they pass Canongate kirk and look across to Holyrood palace.

It is right that our Parliament pays tribute to the Duke of Edinburgh today. In doing so, we mourn his passing and extend our deepest sympathy to Her Majesty the Queen and her family. We reflect on his distinguished wartime record, his love and support for the Queen and his decades of public service to Scotland, the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth. Above all, we celebrate and honour an extraordinary life.

I move,

That the Parliament expresses its deep sadness at the death of His Royal Highness The Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh; conveys its sincere condolences to Her Majesty The Queen and the Royal Family for their loss; acknowledges the deep respect and affection in which His Royal Highness was held in Scotland, and expresses gratitude for his outstanding contribution over many decades to public life in Scotland, his support for a wide variety of Scottish institutions and for a lifetime of dedicated service to the people of Scotland.

11:08

Ruth Davidson (Edinburgh Central) (Con):
Presiding Officer,

“Grief is the price we pay for love”.

Quoting Colin Murray Parkes, the Queen was speaking on behalf of the nation when she said those words 20 years ago. I cannot imagine what it is like to be married to someone for 73 years. I cannot imagine what it is like to have to get up and face every future day without that person, or what that absence feels like. The recognition of the enormity of such a loss is what has led many people over the past few days to look past the titles and the 41-gun salutes and have a sense of feeling on a human level for Her Majesty.

For most of us in the chamber, and for most people outside it, our picture of His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh is of an elderly man. He was active, vigorous, gruff, witty and still able to stand ramrod straight, but, by the very fact of reaching the age of 99, a person has been of pensionable age for decades. Therefore, for my generation and those coming after, that dashing young naval officer in his 20s, the husband made consort at 30 and the palace moderniser intent on propelling post-war Britain to the front ranks in science, research, industry and technology exists only in Pathé news footage. Here was a man who

was born before the discovery of penicillin, the creation of the United Nations and the invention of the television and jet engine but who was a moderniser in life as well as in work. How many men in the 1950s gave up their job for their wife's career? How many headed the household, making the decisions and smoothing the way? How many walked behind their spouse or accepted that their children would never take their surname? As Barack Obama wrote,

"Prince Philip showed the world what it meant to be a supportive husband to a powerful woman."

If all that he had done had been to undertake his vow at the coronation to be her

"liege man of life and limb",

that would have been enough to have recorded his place in history, but it is clear that not only was he a man of huge practical ability—a decorated and talented naval officer, a qualified pilot and a natural sailor and horseman—but he had interests, passions and issues that he wanted to use his position to drive forward, and he focused on engineering, research, youth, the outdoors and conservation. In a life that could so easily have been about one shallow wave, a ribbon cut and a couple of public remarks before moving on to the next engagement, he demonstrated huge commitment to the organisations that he championed.

He served 64 years as the captain general of the Royal Marines; 61 years heading the Duke of Edinburgh's award scheme, which he created for young people; and 20 years as the president of WWF UK, which he helped to found, with a further 15 years as the international president of WWF. Here, in this city and in my constituency, he served 57 years as the chancellor of the University of Edinburgh. As former principal Timothy O'Shea remembers, although the duke was a huge supporter of the university's academic excellence and was involved in opening buildings and conferring degrees, he was a particular supporter of the sometimes wild celebrations surrounding the installation of any new rector, giving Prof O'Shea into trouble when one such installation was too sedate for his liking.

His association with the city of Edinburgh stretched to patronage of more than 30 organisations including the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland, the National Galleries of Scotland and the Royal British Legion. Of course, he was no stranger to Holyrood—both the palace and the Parliament—and he hosted numerous representatives from the latter in the former. At a reception for Pope Benedict's visit, on seeing Iain Gray sporting a tie in the papal tartan, the duke turned to Tory leader Annabel Goldie to ask whether she had a pair of knickers made out of

that. Quite properly, Annabel retorted, "I couldn't possibly comment, and, even if I did, I couldn't possibly exhibit them." It is no wonder that, when asked to sum up his grandparents' connection, Prince William said simply, "He makes her laugh."

There has been tension in the coverage of the duke's death—a sense of grappling with the positions that he held and the narrative of someone who could be irascible and could say the wrong thing—much of it coloured by people's views on the institution of the monarchy. However, anyone who, in their life, fought in the second world war, set up an organisation to help young people build resilience and change the course of their lives for the better, helped to found the world's largest conservation charity to save endangered species, gave of his time to help 800 individual charities and was still working well into his 90s deserves to have that life recognised.

As the Queen remarked on her golden wedding anniversary,

"he is someone who doesn't take easily to compliments",

so he would probably hate all the fuss. However, to have achieved all of that while undertaking his greatest job and duty of being partner, friend and confidant to the monarch for 73 years, always just two steps behind, supporting the Queen and being her strength and stay for all those years, reflects a life of remarkable public service. As an exiled prince, he came to Scotland as a boy, and his time here shaped the man that he would become. His relationship with Scotland endured and was woven into the service that he gave on behalf of the whole United Kingdom and the Commonwealth.

On behalf of my party, I support the motion of condolence on the life of service of His Royal Highness Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, and I offer our sincere condolences to his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, and to Her Majesty the Queen.

11:14

Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab): I associate the Labour benches with the tributes that have been paid to His Royal Highness Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh. On Friday, we lost an extraordinary public servant who dedicated his long life to our country as well as transforming the lives of young people around the world and promoting global conservation, which we all now recognise is so important.

On behalf of the entire Scottish Labour Party, I offer my condolences to everyone who is in mourning here and across the Commonwealth; to all his loved ones; to the royal family; to his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren; and, in particular, to Her Majesty the Queen.

For more than seven decades, Prince Philip was a constant at the Queen's side. None of us can even begin to understand the pressure of being monarch in what has often been described as a lonely job, but we know, from all that has been said and written, how much the Queen cherished the support, counsel and love of her husband.

Although their lives may have been different from ours, as humans we can all empathise with what it means to lose a loved one. That is hard for anyone, no matter how many years they have shared together, but the Queen has lost her beloved husband after their spending more than 70 years together. I cannot even imagine how that must feel, and my thoughts and prayers are with Her Majesty for the difficult times ahead.

Unlike others in the chamber, I never had the privilege of meeting Prince Philip, so I am afraid that I do not have any personal anecdotes that I can contribute in addition to the wonderful tributes that people have heard today and, indeed, in recent days. However, I was struck by a personal anecdote that some may have heard in recent days on television or radio. It came from a man called Jon Watts, who was jailed at the age of just 17. Jon recalled that there was

"lots of alcohol and no aspirations"

for people like him, but while he was in prison he came across the Duke of Edinburgh's award, which he said gave him a new sense of direction. He camped out for the first award, not on a Scottish mountainside but in a tent on the artificial grass of a prison football pitch. Jon went on to get the bronze, silver and gold awards while serving a six-year sentence. The skill that he learned during the programme was cooking, and on leaving prison he set up his own catering business. He now helps other young people to learn new skills and find new jobs. "It saved my life," Jon said last week.

That is just one life that the prince helped to save. There will be countless others from different walks of life. Actually, millions of young people from all walks of life are reaching their full potential thanks to the Duke of Edinburgh's award, from the prince's school at Gordonstoun to Drumchapel high school and right across the UK and the world. I am sure that I am not the only parent in the country who has helped to support their children around their mini or junior dukes or the Duke of Edinburgh's award.

When Prince Philip launched the awards, in 1956, he said:

"If you can get a young person to succeed in any one activity, then that feeling of success will spread over into many others."

Following the difficult year that so many young people have faced with their lives and their

learning being disrupted by Covid, Prince Philip's words from 65 years ago are just as relevant today. They are a reminder of the collective national mission that we face in the years ahead in making sure that every child fulfils their potential.

In closing, I once again pay tribute to the life of the Duke of Edinburgh and recognise his lasting contribution to our country. I express my condolences to everyone who is mourning his passing—not just his family, but people right across the country and beyond—and I extend my sympathies to everyone who has lost a loved one in this most difficult of years.

11:18

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I join the other party leaders in offering my sincere condolences to Prince Philip's family, his friends and all those who will miss him.

In this chamber, as in this country, we do not all share the same views of the monarchy, or the same feelings today. It would be wrong to pretend that we did. As a party that wishes for an elected head of state, we reflected carefully on whether and how we should take part in today's proceedings. However, just as it would be wrong to give a performance of feelings not sincerely felt, it would equally be wrong to imply by our absence any kind of personal disrespect to those who have lost someone important to them, whether personally or otherwise.

This has been a year of terrible loss for the world, including up to 150,000 Covid deaths across the UK—most of them announced without ceremony as daily statistics. The toll has been heaviest on those with the least, but although there is no great leveller in how we live our lives, we are reminded today that no extreme of wealth, privilege or status can protect us from mortality. "Jock Tamson's bairns" may be something of a cliché, but in that respect every human being is, indeed, equal. Death comes to us all, and every family faces the pain of loss. Regardless of our different views, respect and compassion are due in equal measure to every one of us at such times.

Such moments bring pain to family and friends, and, with a public figure like Prince Philip, others will share that pain to a greater or lesser degree. For an individual, a family or a society, death is also part of life's cycle, which brings a change of the generations. Those who come after will build on the legacy that they have been left, but they will also rethink, reinvent and alter course. They still owe much to those who went before, who may have lived by different values.

Many have spoken about Prince Philip's environmentalism. Today's environmental movement overwhelmingly places responsibility

for the global crisis on the powerful and would not seek to reconcile conservation with the blood sports of the wealthy. Yet it is still the case that a debt is owed to those whose environmentalism did achieve global awareness, even if it was shaped by values that were different from today's.

It is said that Prince Philip wished to modernise the monarchy. No doubt, in time, it will consider whether it can do so and how a royal family can keep pace with the modern, democratic society that it is supposed to serve, and how it must show respect for the diversity of that society in its words and its deeds. Others will question whether it can and should retain its place. That debate is not for today.

Today is a moment to extend our thoughts to Prince Philip's family and to all those who are grieving for their loved ones, in a spirit of respect for the equal value of every human life.

11:21

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): I associate myself with all the fitting tributes that have been made today and over the weekend.

I used to wear a badge on my lapel—it was a little blue man. The Duke of Edinburgh spotted it at a reception. He bounced up, demanding to know what it was. "To show support for the prostate cancer campaign," I said. He looked at me closely and said, "Have you got it or are you against it?" Then he bounced off again. The engagement was only 30 seconds long, but it has stayed with me, and it has been retold numerous times over the years.

It seemed that the Duke of Edinburgh left lasting impressions on many others, too. Some were less repeatable than others, but so many were fun and memorable. Sometimes he offended, but I do not share the view of some that he was an offensive man. For many, he has been part of a family that has provided comfort and stability in what can be a turbulent and intimidating world. His decades of public service through his 99 years with us; his steadfast presence when so much has been changing; his support for the Queen, his wife, for whom he was her "strength and stay"; his loyal service to family and country; his weight behind charities, especially environmental ones—all of those things are good things, and we should cherish good things.

My two boys have been active in the Duke of Edinburgh's award programme. Ali worked through all the levels to secure the gold award, learning kayaking, volunteering, film making—all sorts of different things. Stephen is still working through it, with expeditions and cooking—to our great benefit—and mountain biking, too.

The Duke of Edinburgh's impact on my family has been great. His impact on millions of others has been utterly outstanding: learning new skills, meeting new people, showing leadership, building teams, maturing and growing. Every year, hundreds of thousands of young people in countries across the globe participate in the programme. Last year, in Scotland alone, 20,000 started the programme and 11,000 achieved awards. The reach is astonishing. The programme was the Duke of Edinburgh's inspiration all those years ago, and it has blossomed under his leadership, changing lives for ever. That is a lasting legacy to be proud of.

To the Queen and her family, I say that all our thoughts are with you today. For everything, Prince Philip, we all say, "Thank you."

The Presiding Officer: I thank all the party leaders for their contributions, and I thank all members who attended this morning. I also thank all members who wished to attend but were unable to because of the restrictions that we are still observing.

I will now convey the terms of the motion to Her Majesty.

Meeting closed at 11:24.

This is the final edition of the *Official Report* for this meeting. It is part of the Scottish Parliament *Official Report* archive and has been sent for legal deposit.

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