

What People are Saying about an Inclusive Anthem

About the Recent Proposal in the Government's Throne Speech (2010)

Alexandra, Danielle, Gillian, Maya, Naia, & Samantha, Grade 5 students :

“We are a group of Grade 5 girls who are working to change our national anthem so the words acknowledge us, the daughters of Canada. Only two words need to change, “thy sons” to “of us”, and our No. 1 song includes all Canadians. We proudly sing “in all of us command” and, by doing so, we will encourage others to join us.”

May, 2010

Judith Thomson, Editorial, Globe and Mail:

“As a feminist with other things on my mind, I hadn't really given much thought to the “all thy sons” line. But since the government brought it up, I've given it a lot of thought. Of course we should change it. Women soldiers are dying for this great country. Female athletes are winning medals for its glory. Equality of rights is enshrined in the Charter. So let's give “both founding genders”, as our only female Prime Minister, Kim Campbell, once put it, their due.”

Globe and Mail, March 19, 2010

Janet Keeping, lawyer & president of the Sheldon Chumir Foundation for Ethics in Leadership:

With the passage of time, I had reached a point where I had stopped thinking much about the words of the national anthem. But this changed with the 2006 death of Captain Nichola Goddard in Afghanistan. Then my passion for the issue was re-ignited in 2009 when a second woman from the Canadian Forces, Karine Blais, died in battle in Afghanistan. The death of a woman at war is, of course, no more a loss than the death of a man. But it is also no less. Equality is a basic right.

Calgary Beacon, March 3, 2010

Shari Graydon :

“Words matter. Just ask scabs and terrorists -- or is that replacement workers and freedom fighters? Research backs this up. And that's why for years now, newspapers have chosen to incorporate gender neutral terms into their style guides. Journalists want what they write to be clear; they want readers to understand what they mean. So they use city councillor not alderman, fire fighter not fireman, and flight attendant not stewardess.”

The Ottawa Citizen, March 8, 2010

Susan Cole:

And, by the way, do we think that if our national anthem were as racially exclusive as it is sexist, we wouldn't be seeing some changes? Of course not. We'd take action if anti-racist groups protested. Instead, even those who agree that "all our sons command" kinda sucks aren't prepared to fight for a change because they think that would make the Harper and the Conservatives look good. Ridiculous.

Now Magazine, March 11, 2010

Former Prime Minister, Kim Campbell, Interviewed on the Current, CBC Radio:

“I think it’s great! My recommendation is just “true patriot love in all of us command.”
March 5, 2010

Sheila Hellstrom, Canada’s first woman general:

“I personally feel embarrassed on occasions such as the recent Olympic Games when the members of our victorious women's hockey team listen to, and sing, the present words, or when the efforts of our service women and men are acknowledged. Although I find the original words are a bit of a tongue-twister, they are much more poetic than the ones I use (“in all of us command”).”

March 2, 2010

Editorial: Thy Sons and Daughters

It is true that changing "O Canada" will not change the lives of Canadians – and much still needs to be done by government and others to ensure equality for women in practice, not just in words. But language is powerful and when it can be made inclusive, it should be. An anthem that effectively leaves out half the population does not faithfully reflect the values of Canadians.

It makes little sense to weed out sexism from the school curriculum only to teach students a version of "O Canada" that leaves them wondering, "Where are the daughters?"

The words to our anthem are hardly sacrosanct. They have been changed before. They can, and should, be changed again. But a return to the original version – "thou dost in us command" – could prove to be an awkward tongue-twister. Other options, such as "in all of us" or "in all our hearts," roll off the tongue more easily.

Toronto Star, March 5, 2010

Adele Mercier, a Queen's University professor who specializes in the philosophy of language:

“The national anthem should reflect its population and Canada consists of 51 per cent women.”

March 3, 2010, The Globe and Mail

Response to Bills S-3, S-39, An Act to amend the National Anthem to Include all Canadians

Ms. Carolyn J. Emerson, Assistant to NSERC/Petro-Canada Chair for Women in Science and Engineering:

"I support your proposed change to "true patriot love in all of us command". I sing those words all the time anyway! Good luck.”

Ms. Elaine Teofilovici, CEO, YWCA:

"As an organization that has for the past century worked to sustain Canadian women in their pursuit of equality and socio-economic autonomy, we are pleased to express our support for Bill S-39, An Act to Amend the National Anthem Act to include all Canadians."

Catherine Clark:

"I was 14, sitting on Parliament Hill in the presence of Her Majesty the Queen on a sunny 1992 Canada Day, when I realized that my national anthem left me out. What struck my young mind that particular Canada Day was the lyric "in all thy sons command", and the fact that our anthem didn't refer to me, or to anyone of my gender."

Toronto Star, August 5, 2001

Senator Landon Pearson:

"It's just this way in which the word "sons" just continually grates on me. I have all these daughters, you see, and I feel they should be recognized as well...":

In an interview with Mary Lou Finlay, As It Happens, CBC Radio, May 29, 2001

Ms. Marcelle Mersereau, MLA, Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick:

"I feel strongly that in 2001 our National Anthem should have language which is inclusive."

Dr. Marion Pardy (The Right Rev.), Moderator, the United Church of Canada:

"Our General Council Executive decided to endorse the campaign to modify the English wording of the national anthem so that it is inclusive of both men and women."

Dr. Lorna R. Marsden, President and Vice-Chancellor, York University:

"Congratulations on your Bill introduced to change the wording of the National Anthem back to its original non-sexist form - your arguments based on the original 1908 version of the wording are indisputable."

Dr. Gail Cuthbert Brandt, Principal and V.C., Renison College, Univ. of Waterloo:

"I congratulate you on your leadership in addressing this issue on behalf of Canadian women."

Dr. Bernard Shapiro, Principal and V.C., McGill University:

"I would certainly support an initiative to modify the wording of the national anthem so that it is inclusive of both women and men."

Dr. Robert Birgeneau, President, University of Toronto:

"I congratulate you on taking the initiative in this very important matter of equity in one of the most powerful expressions of our Canadian identity - our national anthem."

The Honourable Mitchell Sharp, P.C., C.C., Personal Advisor, PMO:

"I write to congratulate you for your decision to introduce legislation that will replace the word "sons" appearing in the national anthem in the phrase "true patriot love in all thy sons command" by a word that has the effect of including both sexes."

Ms. Barbara E. Crowder, Executive Director, Association of Canadian Clubs:

"We're supporting you!"

Mr. Peter Trueman, O.C., former anchor, Global Television Network:

"In my view the words "true patriot love in all thy sons command should be replaced by the words "true patriot love in all of us command."

Dr. Wendy Robbins, Founder of University of New Brunswick's Women's Studies Dept:

"The amended version is what thousands of fair-minded women and men sing now, and will continue to sing."

Mr. Stuart Lindop, B.A., WWII Veteran:

"The women who are members of our Canadian Armed Forces must find a certain irony when they sing our national anthem, especially the fourth sentence, true patriot love in all thy sons command. Women are implicitly excluded from recognition."

Dr. Margrit Eichler, Director, Institute for Women's Studies and Gender Studies, University of Toronto:

"The Board unanimously endorsed your campaign. We consider this an important issue and are happy that you are bringing this issue before parliament."

Dr. Matthew Teitelbaum, Director, Art Gallery of Ontario:

"I feel strongly that this is a worthwhile change, and that Canada will benefit from the inclusiveness of the proposed bill."

Ms. Catherine Laidlaw-Sly, President, National Council of Women of Canada:

"The National Council of Women of Canada (NCWC) supports your initiative and proposed Bill to change the words of the national anthem to make them inclusive, rather than exclusive of women."

Ms. Stephanie MacKendrick, President, Canadian Women in Communications:

"I think it's a very important yet simple request to make the language of the national anthem inclusive."