



CANADA

# Debates of the Senate

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2nd SESSION



37th PARLIAMENT



VOLUME 140



NUMBER 91

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## NATIONAL ANTHEM ACT

**Bill to Amend—Third Reading of Bill S-3**

**Speech by:**

**The Honourable Vivienne Poy**

**Wednesday, October 29, 2003**

## THE SENATE

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### NATIONAL ANTHEM ACT

BILL TO AMEND—THIRD READING—  
DEBATE ADJOURNED

**Hon. Vivienne Poy** moved third reading of Bill S-3, to amend the National Anthem Act to include all Canadians.—(*Honourable Senator Poy*).

She said: Honourable senators, it is my pleasure to speak at third reading debate on Bill S-3, to amend the National Anthem Act to include all Canadians. Bill S-3 proposes that the English lyrics of the anthem be amended by replacing the words “all thy sons command” with the words “all of us command.” No change to the French lyrics is proposed. The bill is co-sponsored by Senator Tommy Banks, and most of you know that he is a noted musician from Alberta.

I would like to thank the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology for their unanimous support of this bill. I would also like to thank the witnesses who appeared before the committee for the time and effort that they devoted to this issue.

As many of you know, Bill S-3, An Act to amend the National Anthem Act to include all Canadians, has a long history in this chamber. It began as an inquiry in February 2001, which resulted in unprecedented media attention and an outpouring of support for the amendment of the national anthem to include women and girls with words that would be more inclusive. I would like to note that many senators, organizations and individuals also expressed their support to me, personally.

Despite this unprecedented level of support for an initiative, and all the people encouraging me to go forward with legislation, I might not have felt compelled to sponsor a bill in the Senate if it had not been for the following reasons: First, Bill S-3 fulfils the commitment of the federal government in 1980 to consider amendments to the National Anthem Act in recognition of the fact that “sons” was not reflective of Canadian society.

[*English*]

• (1720)

At the time the national anthem was being debated in the other place and in the Senate on June 27, 1980, all three House leaders agreed to facilitate the adoption of the bill by limiting the debate during second reading to one speaker for each party and not proposing any amendments to the English version of the national anthem.

Through this expedited process, the National Anthem Act passed through the other place and the Senate in one day. Some of my honourable colleagues may remember this event. This sense of urgency around the passage of the National Anthem Act stemmed from the collective unease about the state of the country's unity as a result of the referendum in Quebec in May of the same year. As such, the federal government felt it was necessary to shore up national symbols that would bind the

country together. Therefore, the act was passed with little input from Canadians.

Nevertheless, the House leaders in the other place recognized that amendments were necessary in the English text and agreed to have them dealt with by way of private members' bills, which would be referred to a special committee at the following session of Parliament.

I will quote the Honourable Secretary of State and Minister of Communications, Francis Fox, who brought the bill forward. He said:

Many would like to see the words “sons” and “native land” replaced to better reflect the reality of Canada. I believe all members are sympathetic to these concerns. I would, therefore, like to assure honourable members that in the course of the next session the government would be willing to see the subject matter of a private members' bill on this question.

In response, Ed Broadbent, then Leader of the NDP stated:

I want to say that in this context that part of the understanding expressed by the minister in introducing the subject today is that a committee will be struck during the next session to deal with some important changes to the wording.

In particular, Mr. Broadbent referred to an amendment to the word “sons.”

That same day, Senator Florence Bird, best known for chairing the Royal Commission on the Status of Women, declared that she was “nobody's son” and was assured that minor amendments would be considered in the next session of Parliament.

The National Anthem Act only passed under the assumption that a special committee would be struck to consider amendments to make it more reflective of our population. However, I regret to inform honourable senators that this procedure was never put in place.

Here we are today, 23 years later. Now is the time to ensure that the commitment made on June 27, 1980, to make the anthem more reflective of Canadian society is fulfilled.

Second, in 1982, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms came into effect. As Senator Beaudoin has so ardently argued in this chamber, this amendment would ensure that the national anthem is in keeping with the principle of equality of rights between the sexes as guaranteed in section 28 of the Charter.

Third, I discovered that contrary to most available sources, including Canadian Heritage, the original wording of *O Canada* in 1908, from the National Archives, did not contain the words “true patriot love in all thy sons command.” Instead, in 1908, the words of *O Canada* read as “true patriot love thou dost in us command.” I note that Canadian Heritage has now corrected the information on its Web site. This amendment returns *O Canada* to its original meaning and intent.

The wording “in all of us command” is merely a modern wording of “thou dost in us command.” Linguists and music historians have declared that this wording is linguistically and musically sound.

Fourth, there was a precedent for changing a national song to make it inclusive of women. In Australia, a country similar to Canada, *Advance Australia Fair* was changed to make it more inclusive. The committee that examined the words of their national song in the early 1980s replaced “Australian sons let us rejoice” by “Australians all let us rejoice” before it was proclaimed officially as a national anthem in 1984.

For the above reasons, I introduced legislation to amend the National Anthem Act in February 2002. Unfortunately, that bill died as a result of prorogation. When the present session of Parliament began, I reintroduced it in its present form as Bill S-3 in October 2002.

I wish to thank all senators who have spoken on Bill S-39 and Bill S-3, both for and against this amendment. It is very important to have a debate about the symbols of our country.

Obviously, there have been concerns about this amendment, some of which my honourable colleagues have raised in this chamber. We all have an attachment to our national anthem and strong feelings about it. I hope that I can address some of the concerns that have been expressed today.

The first concern that I heard raised is that it is not possible to amend the anthem because it is our tradition. However, Sir Robert Stanley Weir amended the song *O Canada* a number of times. There were at least 25 different versions of *O Canada* in circulation throughout the 20th century. The committee that met to examine the national anthem in 1967 also altered nine words of the anthem.

Therefore, the tradition of the national anthem, such as it is, dates back to 1980. Indeed, if one wants to stay with tradition, one should go back to the original 1908 version of *O Canada*, which included the word “us” instead of “sons” and best reflects the intent of the author.

The next concern expressed is that this bill is about political correctness. It is not. Many words commonly used are no longer acceptable in Canadian society. The *Canadian Press Style* guide dictates inclusive language and even *Star Trek* has changed its opening to “where no one has gone before.”

Many churches offer alternative versions in their hymnals that are inclusive of women. The United Church declares in its guidelines that inclusive language is important because “language both reflects and shapes our world...the use of inclusive language is thus a justice issue and cannot be dismissed as a passing fashion or a concern of a radical few.”

Indeed, if Sir Robert Stanley Weir used inclusive language in the original wording of *O Canada*, why should we deem the proposed amendments as politically correct? The inclusive wording dates back to 1908.

Another concern is that this amendment shows disrespect for men who fought in wars. The national anthem is heard every day in schools and at social events, so going to war is not the only way to show patriotism. This amendment does not take away any

recognition from our veterans. It would if it were to read as “all thy daughters command.”

An amendment to the word “us” merely includes all the women who were also involved in the war efforts in enumerable ways in the past. Think about all the women who helped on the home front in the factories, the women pilots who delivered the planes to the men in the air force, and those who worked as nurses serving in the front lines.

We all know how important the contributions of women have been during wartime. For example, in World War I, 2,504 nurses served in the overseas military forces of Canada, and 39 of them died in action. Are these sacrifices not worthy of inclusion?

In fact, one of the most passionate advocates of this amendment is from a World War II veteran from Alberta, Stuart Lindop. He has argued that:

• (1730)

As a veteran, a volunteer, wounded in action liberating Holland, I am very well aware of the tremendous contribution made by women to Canada’s war effort in the Armed Forces, in industry, and on the home front. 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.

A mother, Lorraine Williams, wrote:

I always sing my own version and replace “in all thy sons command” with “in all of us command.” It is really that simple... I have a daughter who is a Major and a pilot in the RCAF, which makes the wording “sons” even more ludicrous.

Finally, there is the concern that this amendment may open the anthem to endless changes. It will not. This legislation does not propose changes to the French version of the national anthem, nor to the word “native” nor to the reference to “God.” Aside from the word “sons,” these are the only two words that have ever been raised with respect to amending the English version of the national anthem.

The word “native” in the dictionary refers to indigenous peoples or descendants of immigrants who were born in a certain country or locality. As an immigrant, Canada is my home and it is the native land of my children and grandchildren because they were born here. In fact, the words “home and native land” include all Canadians.

As for the reference to “God,” this is in keeping with the preamble to the Charter, and the word “God” in the dictionary refers to a superior spiritual being — it is not necessarily Christian in designation. The majority of Canadians, whether we practice a religion or not, believe in some higher spiritual being.

Clearly, the word “sons” is the issue meriting the most concern. Since 1984, all six private members bills that have been introduced in the other place called for amendment to the word that makes it more inclusive of women. All the bills, sponsored by three members of Parliament, were the result of petitions from constituents. This amendment is of the greatest concern to

Canadians. Therefore, the intent of this bill is simply to update the anthem so that it is more reflective of our society today, as well as inclusive of more than 50 per cent of our population.

I would like to assure all honourable senators that this is a positive amendment. As the Honourable Mitchell Sharp, who has a long history in the Government of Canada, wrote:

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.

Dr. Lorna Marsden, whom some of you may remember from her days in the Senate, now president of York University, wrote:

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. Robert Birgeneau, President of the University of Toronto, also wrote:

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.

Mr. Peter Trueman, well-known from his days as a news anchor on Global Television, wrote:

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.”

Ms. Stephanie MacKendrick, president of Canadian Women in Communications, also wrote:

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

Women’s organizations and women’s studies groups also endorse this amendment. The United Church, in keeping with its policy of inclusive language in its hymnals, also passed a motion that supported this amendment.

I would like to stress the importance of this amendment for future generations, for girls and boys who are studying in school today. It represents a real commitment to equality in the words of our most important song. The YWCA of Canada has written to

say that they see a need for change in the anthem to reflect the aspirations of girls.

Consider the schoolchildren who sing this anthem. A number of teachers have also taken up the cause. In 1993, Judith Olson, a music teacher in Ontario, launched the *O Canada* Fairness Committee, after having numerous students wonder about the implicit exclusion in the words “in all thy sons command.”

Another community leader, Frances Brogan, wrote:

While volunteering as a pathfinder leader a number of years ago, I was struck by the inappropriateness of the words “in all thy sons command.” One evening as I sang those words, I realized that I was standing in the midst of a group of young women. From that day, I began to use, “in all of us command.”

Now consider the recent women university graduates who now often outnumber their male counterparts. As Ruth Rees, a professor at Queen’s University, wrote:

I was at a convocation at Queen’s University...where I read for the umpteenth time our national anthem. As we were honouring a woman as our honorary doctorate, I realized just how archaic the anthem is.

I have received numerous letters from fathers and husbands who feel uncomfortable with the wording of the anthem and asked that it be changed. The numerous letters of support from organizations and individuals, and the thousands of signatures on a petition for this amendment mean that I represent many Canadian voices in speaking today.

Honourable senators, we have an anthem that excludes half of our schoolchildren sitting in their classrooms. Its wording contradicts the message that teachers everywhere are delivering: that girls and boys are equal in ability, capacity, and in service to their country. We need to correct this situation for the future of Canada.

Consider the women in our military today who stand proudly ready to fight for Canada, and consider the women who supported the war effort so ably in the past. Think of the women athletes who have gained great acclaim at the Olympics, and think of the immigrant women who thought they had arrived in a country of equal opportunities.

Honourable senators, when *O Canada* is played to proud acclaim, it is meant to inspire. Let it inspire all Canadians.