

O Canada lyric change sparks debate, but the anthem was originally gender neutral

The decision of the Canadian Senate to change the lyrics of the national anthem to a gender neutral version has sparked a heated debate across the country, but the first official version of the anthem was already gender-neutral.

The Senate voted to change the end of the lyric “**True patriot love in all of thy sons command**” to “**in all of us command.**” Senator Frances Lankin, who sponsored the bill, told reporters Wednesday that while the Senate altered only two words, the move holds great symbolic value.

“It may be small. It’s about two words. But it’s huge in terms of one of our major national symbols, the anthem we sing with pride about our country. And we can now sing it with pride knowing the rules will support us, the law will support us in terms of the language, and we will sing — all of us,” she told reporters.

While several have come out in support of the original “in all thy sons command” lyric, the Canadian national anthem has actually gone through several iterations. The late 19th century saw Quebecers create the first version of the anthem, which the New York Times reports was written as an alternative to “**God Save the Queen.**”

Twenty-years later, the music was adopted by English-speaking Canadians and played to the lyrics of a poem by Adolphe-Basile Routhier. After several littler-known versions came and went, the Times reports that the first version of the anthem officially adopted was Robert Stanley’s in 1908.

In this version, the second line of the anthem read “**True patriot love, thou dost in us command.**” In 1904 that lyric was changed to “**in all thy sons command,**” but complaints about the gender exclusivity of the statement began surfacing as early as the 1950s.

The Canadian government’s website includes a page with the history of the national anthem.

<https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/anthems-canada/history-o-canada.html>

The page features four versions of the anthem that emerged in the early 1900s, including the current version.

The French lyrics of 1880 remain unchanged.

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Three alternate versions in addition to the official version of O Canada from past years.

Richardson's version:

"O Canada! Our fathers' land of old
Thy brow is crown'd with leaves of red and gold.

Beneath the shade of the Holy Cross
Thy children own their birth

No stains thy glorious annals gloss
Since valour shield thy hearth.

Almighty God! On thee we call
Defend our rights, fend this nation's thrall,
Defend our rights, fend this nation's thrall."

McCulloch's version:

"O Canada! in praise of thee we sing;
From echoing hills our anthems proudly ring.
With fertile plains and mountains grand
With lakes and rivers clear,

Eternal beauty, thou dost stand
Throughout the changing year.

Lord God of Hosts! We now implore
Bless our dear land this day and evermore,
Bless our dear land this day and evermore."

Buchan's version:

"O Canada, our heritage, our love
Thy worth we praise all other lands above.

From sea to sea throughout their length
From Pole to borderland,

At Britain's side, whate'er betide
Unflinchingly we'll stand

With hearts we sing, "God save the King",
Guide then one Empire wide, do we implore,

And prosper Canada from shore to shore."