

Opinion: Nannygate, so called, is not a scandal for Trudeau ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

"Nannygate?"

Come on, everyone, let's give it a break. Nannygate, so called, is not a scandal. It is not even a faux-scandal. It is nothing. It is just a label that careless journalists slap on a piece of innocuous public information — that the household staff at the prime minister's residence includes two individuals who care for the three young children of Justin Trudeau and Sophie Grégoire-Trudeau — one caregiver for days and one for evenings and nights.

Nannygate is a label that cynical politicians invoke in a mean-spirited attempt to embarrass the young PM and his wife.

Two nannies on the payroll do not a Watergate make. We should all, journalists and politicians, make a New Year's resolution to drop the suffix "-gate" from our vocabulary now and for all time.

As those of us of a certain age remember, Watergate was the real deal. It was the monumental political scandal of its era (the 1970s) or just about any era in American public life. Watergate was pure evil. It was a criminal conspiracy that destroyed the presidency of Richard Nixon. It forced the disgraced president to resign from office.

No fewer than 69 individuals were indicted on criminal charges and 48 of them, including some of the top officials in the Nixon administration, were eventually sent to jail.

How can anyone be so stupid or naive as to try to draw a parallel between two nannies in Trudeau's Ottawa and the cesspool of corruption that was Richard Nixon's Washington?

It's not as though there is anything unusual about the Trudeaus' household arrangements. Prime ministers with spouses who are involved in their official duties need help. We pay PMs (and by extension their spouses) to be on duty 24-7.

They work early and they work late. They welcome and entertain visiting dignitaries on the weekend. They travel a lot — just look at Trudeau's schedule so far; they grab sleep when they can on overnight flights. And they can't take a personal day off when a child is sick at home or a teenage babysitter fails to show up.

Justin and his two brothers had a nanny who was on the public payroll when their father was prime minister.

Brian Mulroney had a housekeeper who "interfaces with the children in a habitual way" (a.k.a., a nanny) and Mila, his wife, had her own office with a staff of three people.

The Harpers did not employ a nanny, but Laureen had a personal assistant while Stephen had a stylist who travelled with him to tend to his silver locks.

The first point is, if we want our leaders to do the job we hire them for, we have to be prepared to provide them with the tools they, in their individual circumstances, deem they need — be they drivers, security guards, housekeepers or, yes, nannies.

It is one thing to criticize the universal child benefit plan for sending money to higher income Canadians who do not need it; Trudeau named himself and Harper in his campaign criticism of the Conservative plan. It is another to expect the prime minister to pay from his own pocket for the staff he needs to do his job.

Yes, Trudeau is well off and he earns a good wage as PM (\$334,800), although not nearly as much as the CEOs of Canada's 100 largest companies (median compensation in 2014: \$6.3 million). None of those corporations approaches the scale of the Government of Canada (\$300 billion a year).

The second point is, Canadians take some pride in a reputation of being warm, welcoming and generous when it comes to less fortunate people — the Syrian refugees being the most recent examples. We like to think of our nation as Good Samaritans in a difficult world.

Why then do we turn around and act like a miserable Scrooge at home? Why do we cry "Nannygate!" because the man we chose to run our country needs — as he does — two nannies?

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