

Opinion: Nannygate a controversy only because Canada undervalues caregivers ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

The furor over nannygate has focused on many issues. Is Prime Minister Justin Trudeau being hypocritical in claiming families “like his” do not need the universal child care benefit, while simultaneously billing taxpayers’ for his nannies’ salaries? Does Sophie Gregoire-Trudeau really need help when she does not have a “real” job?

Surprisingly, what is omitted from such discussions are the concerns of the caregivers at the heart of this controversy.

Caregivers Marian Puego and Marilou Trayvilla take care of Xavier, Ella-Grace and Hadrien Trudeau at an hourly rate of \$11 to \$20, depending on whether they are working the day or the night shift. Without Puego and Trayvilla, the Trudeau household will simply not function. After all, who will take care of the children when Trudeau is running the country and Gregoire-Trudeau is tasked with the unpaid, unacknowledged responsibilities of representing Canada? Who will ensure the children experience some semblance of normalcy when their parents have such hectic schedules?

Unfortunately, despite undertaking the essential job of child-rearing, Puego and Trayvilla are paid the least among the household staff members working for the Trudeaus. Depending on the numbers of hours they work and the shifts they take, their wages may even fall below a living wage, which many calculate to be at least \$15 an hour. Care work is real work, and deserves proper compensation.

What is even more problematic is how the nannygate controversy has elided consideration of the sacrifices many caregivers make. What trade-offs did Puego and Trayvilla make to be able to work for the Trudeaus? One way Canadian parents meet their caregiving needs is by hiring as nannies women from countries such as Mexico and the Philippines. In many cases, these women leave their own children behind to do so. Many caregivers hired by Canadian families are employed through the Caregiver Program, which allows caregivers to apply for permanent residency for themselves and their families after completing a two-year work contract. Many caregivers withstand exploitative situations to finish their contracts, get permanent residency, and be reunited with their children.

Trudeau has, to my knowledge, benefited from the labour of women who were either former or current caregivers under that program. As such, his government should spearhead initiatives to ensure caregivers’ security of status and to hasten family reunification for caregivers and their children.

Ultimately, the invisibility of the people at the heart of nannygate speaks to the inadequacy of child care in Canada, and how we continuously pay only lip service to the agonizing balancing act that families with young children must endure.

While I am not naive enough to imagine the Trudeaus would ever have issues with finding a spot for their children in publicly funded daycare — I imagine that unlike other parents, they wouldn’t have to be put on a wait list — they’re like many Canadian families in that they, too, have to think about their options. Child care in Canada remains expensive and inaccessible. For this reason, Trudeau’s government should revisit proposals to create a national child care policy.

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