

CANADA

China's Consul General threatens Tory MP Bob Saroya before 2021 election, committee hears



By Sam Cooper • Global News

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WATCH: Trudeau's chief of staff, Katie Telford faced questions Friday about potential foreign interference. – Apr 14,



CHINESE INTERFERENCE

A Toronto-area Conservative MP allegedly received a “threatening text message” from China’s Toronto Consul General weeks before the 2021 federal election, a Parliamentary committee heard.

At the hearing regarding Chinese foreign interference held Friday, Conservative MP Michael Cooper told Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s chief of staff **Katie Telford** that “Bob Saroya, the then member of Parliament for Markham-Unionville, received a cryptic and threatening text message from Beijing’s Consul general in Toronto, suggesting that he would no longer be a member of Parliament after the 2021 election.”

Telford was being questioned on a number of briefs provided to Trudeau’s government in recent years about China’s alleged role in the 2019 and 2021 elections.

“Were you, the Prime Minister or anyone in the Prime Minister’s Office briefed or otherwise have knowledge about that text message?” Cooper asked Telford.

“I can’t speak to that information,” Telford answered. “Because as I said before, as frustrating as it is for both or all of us, is I can’t get into confirming, let alone denying information, [and] going beyond the bounds of the security heads, who were here [testifying to PROC] before me.”

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Several parliamentary committees have been examining China’s interference threats since Global News exclusively reported last November on intelligence

documents and source allegations that outlined vast interference from the Toronto Chinese consulate in the 2019 federal election, subsequent broader interference in the 2021 election, and activities against members of diaspora communities in Canada.

Global also first reported in November 2022 that intelligence briefs **alleged that before the September 2021** federal election, “a small number of MPs reported they feared for their families and their reputations and believed they were being targeted in operations to hurt their election chances.”

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The information comes from a January 2022 Privy Council Office “Special Report” reviewed by Global News.

While Saroya was not identified by name in that report, the case of an alleged text message threat to Saroya from a Chinese official, referenced by Cooper on Friday, appears to fit the description.

In late 2022, two senior Conservative sources told Global News that Saroya had reported Chinese officials had threatened him ahead of the 2021 election and reported the incident to CSIS.

However, Saroya told Global News in late 2022 he could not comment on the allegations, and he did not immediately respond for comment on Friday.

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In 2019, Saroya won the Markham-Unionville riding with 49 percent of the vote and in the 2021 election Liberal Paul Chiang took the riding by the same percentage. Saroya's share of votes, on the other hand, dropped to 38 percent.

Telford's exchange with Cooper typified much of her testimony. She said that due to security of information laws, she could not publicly comment on whether Trudeau and his staff and ministers were briefed on details of intelligence reported on by Global News and the Globe and Mail.

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Telford acknowledged, however, "it is quite possible" the prime minister was briefed on a Chinese election interference scheme in January 2022.

Telford said that a list of "formal" intelligence briefings for Trudeau that was provided to the hearing by his national security advisor Jody Thomas was "not exhaustive."

"It is quite possible there were discussions in that time period (of January 2022) around foreign interference," Telford told the hearing. However, she did not confirm or deny whether Trudeau and his office were made aware of specific allegations of election interference that were reported in a January 2022 Privy Council Office "Special Report" — a document that Global News has reviewed and reported on.

Telford also disputed Global News' reporting from a November story derived from national security sources, **who alleged** that the Chinese consulate funnelled money through proxies to federal candidates in the 2019 election.

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However, a high-level January 2022 PCO brief specifically referenced the transactions. "A large clandestine transfer of funds earmarked for the federal election from the PRC Consulate in Toronto was transferred to an elected provincial government official via a staff member of a 2019 federal candidate," **said the report**, which was also finalized, suggesting it was intended to be read by Trudeau and his senior aides.

Along the lines of foreign funding, Conservative MP Michael Cooper called for Telford's testimony following Global's exclusive February 2023 story, which revealed that national security officials drafted a warning for Prime Minister Trudeau and his office more than a year before the 2019 federal election, alleging that Chinese agents were "assisting Canadian candidates running for

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political offices,” according to a Privy Council Office document reviewed by Global News.

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Records showed the memo was written by the office of National Security and Intelligence Advisor Daniel Jean at the request of Telford. Those same documents indicate that the document, called “Memorandum for the Prime Minister,” was also provided to Privy Council Office clerk Michael Wernick.

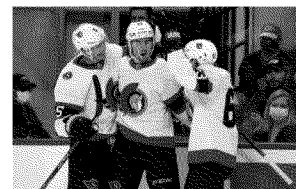
The four-page June 2017 memo asserted that senior intelligence officials had well-documented evidence of China’s efforts to infiltrate “all levels of government” and goes on to allege that “[T]here is a substantial body of evidence that Chinese officials are actively pursuing a strategy of engagement to influence Canadian officials in ways that can compromise the security of Canada and the integrity of Canadian institutions.”

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In recent testimony in another House of Commons committee regarding Chinese interference, MPs heard former CSIS officer Michel Juneau Katsuya recommend a new national and independent office with powers to investigate and prosecute acts of foreign interference and also rapid adoption of counter-interference laws that have already been implemented by Canadian allies such as Australia.

Former **CSIS** officers Michel Juneau Katsuya and **Dan Stanton** were among the witnesses, including former Conservative MP Kenny Chiu and former Sing Tao Daily editor Victor Ho, who told MPs that they believe the Chinese Communist Party has deeply undermined democratic institutions in Canada.

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▶ **Expert says Canada needs to 'clean up' alleged Chinese interference**

"We are focused on China because it is the A-Team. There is no comparison [to other nations] in terms of scope," Stanton said. "China continues to play chess while Canada plays whack-a-mole."

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Juneau Katsuya testified that he learned during a 1990s joint investigation by CSIS and RCMP that consular officials from the People's Republic of China were allegedly clandestinely funding both the Liberal and Conservative parties of Canada.

Juneau Katsuya suggested that these operations have expanded in scope and sophistication in recent years, but during the 1990s, CSIS collected vital intelligence of China's clandestine funding of Canadian politicians because the Chinese diplomats targeting some ridings and nominations were "very sloppy."

"CSIS has known about People's Republic's foreign interference in Canada for at least the last 30 years, and every government in this period has been compromised and infiltrated by agents of influence," testified Juneau Katsuya, adding he believes "every government" allowed key decisions to be manipulated by agents of influence or partisan concerns.

Stanton said he agreed.

"This is an existential threat," Stanton testified. He said for 30 years, the People's Republic of China has been operating with "confidence bordering on arrogance" and targeting the "soft underbelly" of Canadian institutions by seeking influence with politicians and bureaucrats.

In answer to MP questions, Stanton said a number of states, including Russia and India, are interfering in Canada, but the "whole of society" networks that are under the control of the People's Republic of China's national security laws make threats from other states look minor in comparison.

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Juneau Katsuya said at CSIS, for example, a “lack of transparency didn’t allow us to share warnings with the public” about serious interference and espionage against Canadian companies. While CSIS privately warned the federal government, “nothing happened” to counter threats.

That is why, he said, Canada needs a new independent office not connected to the RCMP and CSIS that Parliament will empower to investigate and prosecute serious acts of interference independently.

He suggested that since successive administrations in Ottawa have turned a blind eye to Chinese Communist Party infiltration, the new agency he recommended would need to be free of political influence in Ottawa.

Local Chinese diplomats have previously denied playing a role in subverting Canadian democracy. “Recently, some Canadian politicians and media outlets have been hyping up the so-called allegations that the Chinese Consulate General in Toronto interfered in Canada’s elections and internal affairs,” the Consulate said in a recent statement. “These claims were utterly groundless. ”

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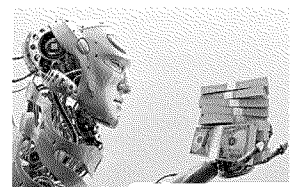
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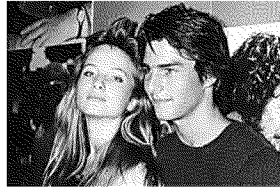
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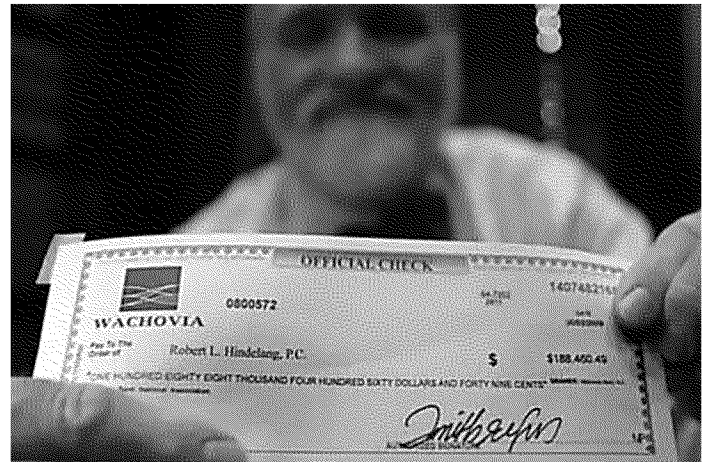
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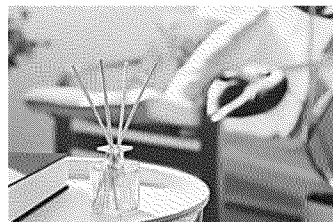


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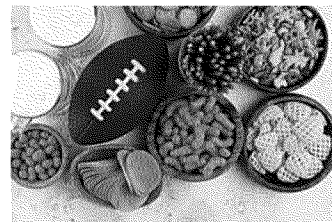
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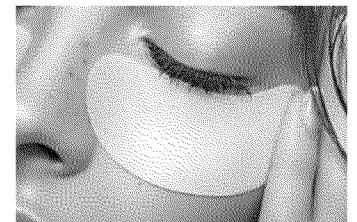
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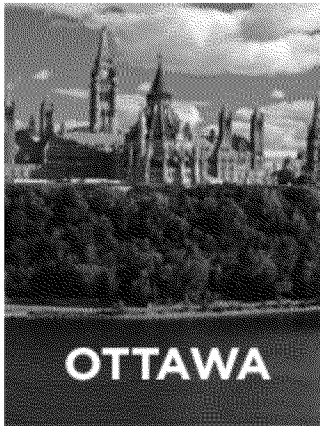
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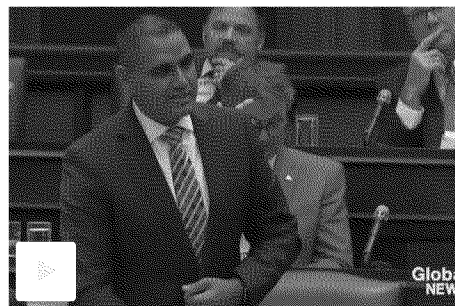
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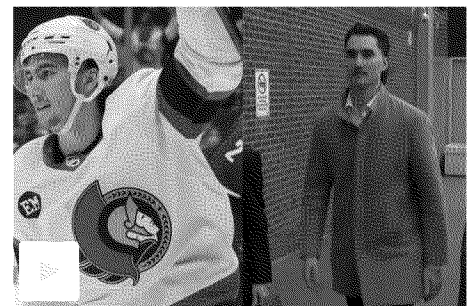
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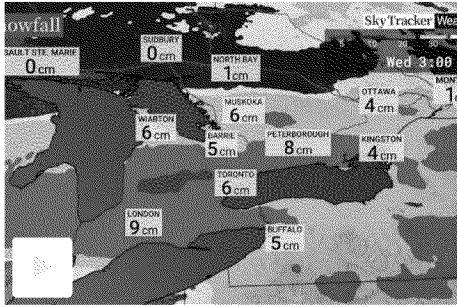
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