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Liberals ignored CSIS warning on 2019 candidate accused in Chinese interference probe: sources



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By Sam Cooper • Global News

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Liberal MP allegedly tied to Chinese interference: sources

Three weeks before Canada's 2019 federal election, national security officials allegedly gave an urgent, classified briefing to senior aides from Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's office, warning them that one of their candidates was part of a Chinese foreign interference network.

According to sources, the candidate in question was Han Dong, then a former Ontario MPP whom Canadian Security Intelligence Service had started tracking in June of that year.

National security officials also allege that Dong, now a sitting MP re-elected in 2021, is one of at least 11 Toronto-area riding candidates allegedly supported by F AdChoices

the 2019 contest. Sources say the service also believes Dong is a witting affiliate in China's election interference networks.

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Three sources with knowledge of the investigation said Dong emerged as a successor to MP Geng Tan as the 2019 Liberal candidate in ways the service found suspicious. These sources spoke to Global News on the condition of anonymity, which they requested because they risk prosecution under the Security of Information Act.

CSIS allegedly had intelligence that Beijing preferred Han Dong to Tan. "The Consulate was not pleased with Geng Tan's performance," a national security official aware of the service's investigation told Global News.

The service relied on surveillance and wiretap evidence as well as human-source reporting, sources said.

In late September, about 48 hours before the federal election nomination deadline, CSIS urged Trudeau's team to rescind Dong's candidacy, a national security official said.

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Sources alleged that Dong frequently called Chinese officials in Ontario and "was considered a close friend of the Toronto Consulate."

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CSIS was also allegedly concerned about the Liberal Party's nomination process. Among other irregularities observed in the September 2019 contest, sources say, was that Chinese international students with fake addresses were allegedly bused to the riding and coerced to vote in Dong's favour. LIGHT

An official with knowledge of the brief also said that the service alleged that "Han Dong was a close contact of Michael Chan, who is a target of CSIS."

Chan, a former Ontario cabinet minister, is a political kingmaker and pivotal Liberal fundraiser. Three intelligence sources said investigators believed Chan had orchestrated Tan's ouster with a campaign that persuaded Justin Trudeau's aides to back Dong instead.

Sources aware of the intelligence said the alleged warning to the PMO about Dong and Chan did not provide details of the ongoing investigation but instead outlined the concerns. They said the warning was intended to protect Canada's democratic institutions.

Those same sources aware of the service's Don Valley North investigations were also troubled by the perceived influence of Chan, who is now deputy mayor of Markham. They say he secretly provided political information to the Toronto Consulate and also promised to attack critics of the Chinese Communist Party.

Both Dong and Chan deny the allegations against them.

"This sort of vague innuendo is impossible to respond to," Chan said in an emailed response to Global News' questions. "To the extent you are suggesting I am not a true Canadian, you should be ashamed of yourself."

In the email, Chan also stated, "First, I have a concern that CSIS or some of its employees are apparently breaking the law in selectively 'leaking' their false and unfounded opinions about me and other Canadians."

With respect to the allegations from CSIS sources who said Dong and Chan were close contacts and part of the alleged 2019 election interference scheme, Chan wrote: “The implication from your phrase ‘in contact’ seems to be an allegation that part of some foreign Chinese spy ring, which is totally outrageous.”

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Dong also rejected the allegations by email.

“As a Member of Parliament, safeguarding Canada’s democratic institutions is a fundamental part of my job, and I take all serious allegations of foreign interference very seriously,” Dong wrote. “I am unaware of the claims provided to you by alleged sources, which contains seriously inaccurate information.”

In an emailed response to the CSIS allegations, Prime Minister’s Office spokesperson Alison Murphy said the law did not permit her to comment on questions regarding secret or top-secret matters. She also declined to answer Global News’ questions, saying they had so many factual inaccuracies that it was not possible “to even begin to answer” them.

When pressed for examples, the PMO did not provide any.

The PMO, did, however, offer support for its MP. “Han Dong is a strong representative who served his community through the pandemic and consistently works to make life better for people, including calling out discrimination that is too often targeted at the Chinese Canadian community,” Murphy said.

The Prime Minister and senior officials maintain that the alleged interference did not compromise the overall results of the 2019 or 2021 contests. “Canadians can have confidence that integrity of our elections held,” Trudeau said Thursday.

Global News has not confirmed the CSIS allegations in this story.

Another reason the service decided to target Dong, an intelligence official said, was his alleged meeting with a senior official from Beijing’s United Front Work Department

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in New York state, according to sources and documents. This event is alleged to have taken place during the service's 2019 election interference probe.

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This organ of the Chinese Communist Party is facilitating Beijing's vast political subversion operations in Canada, according to a January 2022 Privy Council Office "Special Report" that summarizes findings from the service's 2019 investigations. Beijing, however, denies using the United Front to support CCP policy abroad.

"The Liberal Party of Canada is becoming the only party that the People's Republic of China can support," says a Dec. 20, 2021, CSIS report reviewed by Global News.

It continues to say that after the September 2021 federal election, CSIS collected intelligence that Chinese consulate officials believe "it is easy to influence Chinese immigrants to agree with PRC's stance."

The report — which CSIS distributed to the CIA, FBI, as well as Australian, New Zealand and British intelligence services — concludes: "PRC officials anticipate that in the next federal election, voters from Mainland China will show their strength again."

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For that reason, ridings in Greater Vancouver and Greater Toronto, such as Don Valley North, are increasingly crucial in Canadian elections. A majority of Don Valley North's

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voters identify as Asian-Canadian, many with ties to Hong Kong or mainland China. As a result, political and economic relations with Beijing play a role in election strategies.

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Global's investigation into Chan's activities in Don Valley North also raises questions of whether CSIS and the RCMP can investigate Canadian politicians, intelligence and political sources said.

It also brings up concerns that Trudeau's office may have downplayed warnings about Chan because of his fundraising ties to senior party officials.

"Michael Chan is involved centrally in decision-making, and the party consults with him and his team," one GTA Liberal politician said, referring to Chan's capacity to recommend local candidates and party personnel to Trudeau's office.

"They are kingmakers of the party, standing behind the scenes and moving their pawns. So if they can produce the money, the party is putty in their hands."

In response to Global's questions about Dong's nomination, Chan said that he supported Dong's candidacy but added that he supported many other federal Liberal candidates.

"That being said, my relationship with him is essentially the same as with many other past or present colleagues," Chan said.

Even if allegations regarding Chan and Dong's alleged acts for the Chinese Communist Party are proven to be true, some national security experts say Canada lacks foreign interference laws that would make these actions illegal.

Intelligence sources added they believe Canadians need to know how deeply endangered future elections are and that the citizens most impacted are Chinese

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Canadians, many of whom fear the power of Chinese President Xi Jinping's growing influence and security apparatus in Canada.

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The concerns also include so-called Chinese police stations currently probed by RCMP investigators in Vancouver and Toronto, where Chinese security officials are believed to operate undercover and target Chinese diaspora citizens, including Beijing's critics.

CSIS would not comment on the specific allegations against Dong and Chan.

"CSIS takes any allegations of foreign interference in Canada's democratic institutions and processes by foreign states, including the People's Republic of China and its ruling Chinese Communist Party, very seriously," wrote spokesman Brandon Champagne in an email.

In response to questions from Global News regarding the service's allegations and reports on China's election interference, officials from the People's Republic's embassy stated: "the allegations in the report are purely baseless and defamatory."

Nominations and Money

Delving more deeply into the alleged irregularities in Dong's 2019 nomination, sources say a case cited in an October 2022 CSIS report, under the subheading "Nomination Processes," outlines systemic issues in the contest, beginning with who is actually voting.

"Individuals who are not Canadian citizens, and therefore cannot vote in elections at any level of government in Canada — can still vote in a party nomination process as long as they are party members," the CSIS record says.

It adds that "gaining a party's nomination in a riding that has long supported that party is akin to winning the subsequent election," and hostile state actors "exploit this loophole to engage in Foreign Interference that target specific candidates in particular electoral ridings."

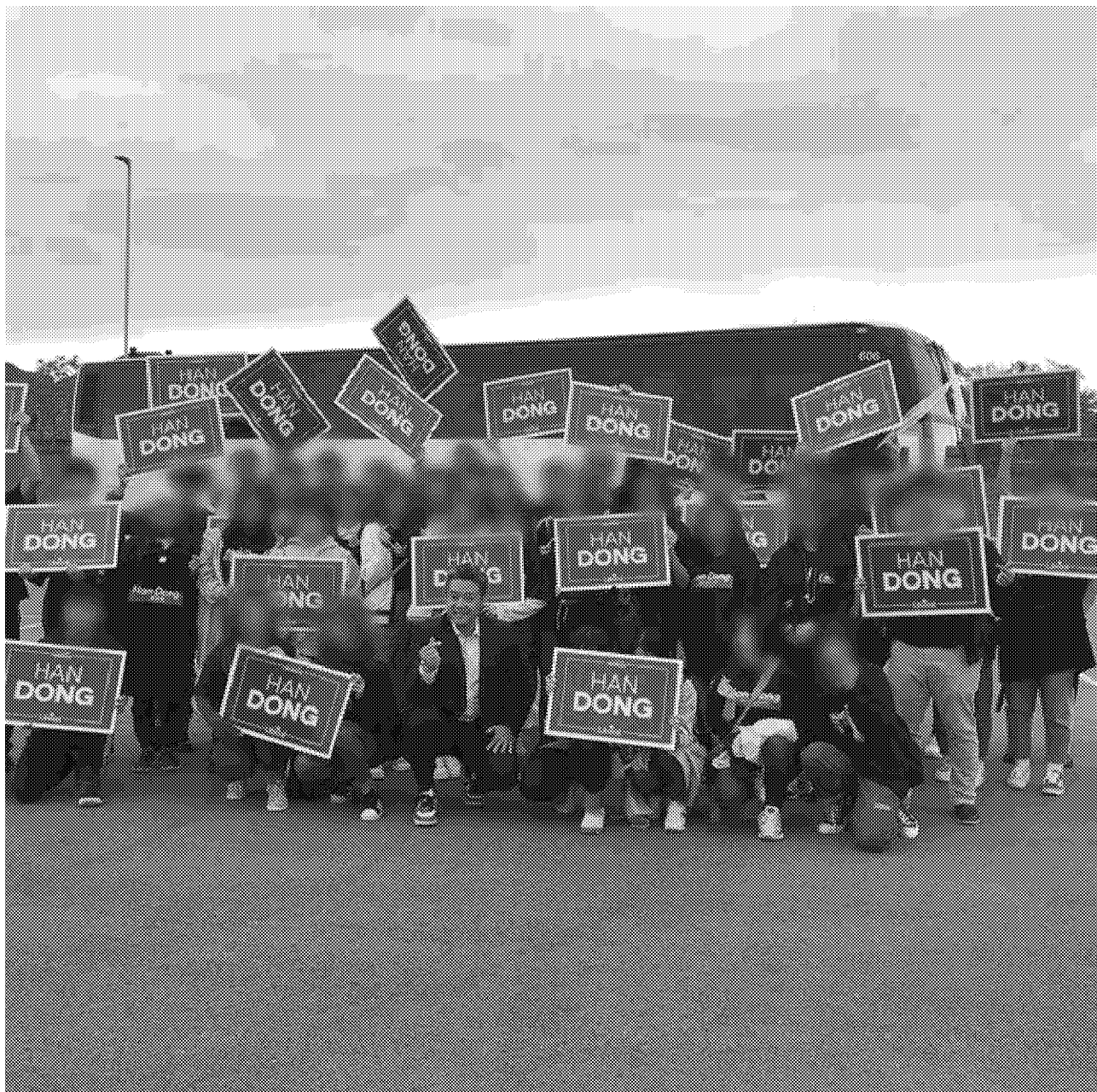
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While it does not identify Dong or his riding, the report describes the service's Don Valley North investigation findings, an intelligence official said.

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"CSIS reporting indicates that, during a political party nomination vote prior to the 2019 General Election in Canada, two busloads of Chinese Canadian seniors were brought in to support a specific candidate," the report says.

It adds that the seniors had the name of the candidate they were told to vote for concealed under their sleeves.



Han Dong, Liberal Party Don Valley North candidate, poses with a group of students in 2019. **Facebook:**
Han Dong / September 15, 2019

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Sources also say CSIS investigations alleged that Chinese international students with fake addresses were bussed into Don Valley North and coerced to vote for Han Dong's nomination in 2019.

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"Chinese international students were also transported in to support the same candidate," the report says. "The students were given letters that provided them with an address in the specific riding, thereby enabling them to participate in the nomination vote. The students were also 'told by the PRC Consulate' to support the specific candidate, 'if they want(ed) to maintain their student visa status.' CSIS intelligence indicates that this candidate is very close to – and receives support from – the PRC Consulate."

In response to these details, the Liberal Party of Canada said that Dong was nominated by registered Liberals in an open nomination process that complied with its national nomination rules. "And we thank Han for his continued work championing the issues that matter to the people of Don Valley North," said LPC director of communications Parker Lund.

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Lund added that an eligible voter in an open nomination process must present identification to prove their address is located in the same electoral district that they are voting in.

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In response to the allegations, Dong said, “my nomination in 2019 was open and followed the rules.”

“In 2019 and again in 2021, my team and I successfully lead an inclusive and welcoming campaign to engage our neighbours in the democratic process,” Dong wrote, “and I reject any attempts to undermine people’s faith in this process.”

The October 2022 CSIS report, which sources say summarized high-level assessments gleaned from the service’s Dong and Chan investigations, explains that Chinese intelligence employs “community networks” to conceal Beijing’s funding and influence of Canadian election candidates.



In October 2022 a Michael Chan York Region Council placard was displayed in front of Chan’s home. **Sam Cooper**

In April 2018, when Chan announced he wouldn't run for re-election as an Ontario MPP, the service had already been monitoring the former cabinet minister for over a decade, according to sources aware of prior and ongoing investigations. LIGHT

Those sources say their concerns included Chan's unusually close relations with Chinese officials and ties with pro-Beijing community leaders also investigated by CSIS in Toronto.

In answer to the CSIS allegation that Chan provided reports on political issues to Chinese officials, he responded, "If they are alleging this, it is not true."

Sources said some of the service's more pointed concerns about Chan and Dong's actions in the Ontario legislature are documented in a July 2018 CSIS record, "Foreign Influenced Activities in Canada: Critical Threats to Canadian Democracy."

"A provincial Cabinet Minister responsible for the province's 'dealings with PRC officials appeared to favour China's interests in many of his activities,'" a document referring to the 2018 CSIS record says. "This individual provided political information to the PRC Consulate and offered to verbally attack other members of the provincial assembly who raised Chinese human rights issues."

The same document also says: "PRC Consulate officials and two members of a provincial legislature persuaded a Member of Parliament at a specific community event to decline an invitation to travel to Taiwan. The PRC Ambassador was kept apprised throughout the event on the progress of their efforts."

Three intelligence sources said Michael Chan and Han Dong were the unidentified Ontario Liberal MPPs who pressured Liberal MP Geng Tan to forgo the Taiwan trip.

Beijing's top foreign policy is the so-called "reunification" of Taiwan, a democratic nation that the Chinese Communist Party considers a renegade province. Thus, much of Beijing's interference in Canada is aimed at blocking any political engagement with

Taiwanese officials, the January 2022 Privy Council Office “Special Report” reviewed by Global News said.

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Geng Tan’s woes

In December 2018, Tan announced he’d run for re-election. His Facebook page shows he continued to attend political events for Trudeau’s government until April 2019.

Around the same time, Geng Tan became engulfed in a bizarre scandal, making him a potential liability for Trudeau in an overwhelmingly Liberal riding where a nomination is equivalent to an election win.

On May 11, a report was published on WeChat, a Chinese state-controlled messaging app, alleging Tan was having an extra-marital affair. A second Chinese media article reported the allegations on May 19.

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Tan has repeatedly denied the affair and declined to comment on this story. “I’m a private citizen,” he told Global News at his home.

An intelligence source directly aware of the Chan investigation said the service believes Chan could have influenced these reports. According to sources with

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knowledge of the CSIS probe, Chan recommended to Trudeau's office that Dong should replace Tan as the nominee for Don Valley North.

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Within a month, Tan announced on Facebook he wouldn't run: "After much consideration, I have come to [the] conclusion that time has now come to spend more time with family and pursue other careers."

On June 25, the National Post ran a story with the following **headline**: "Liberal MP hired girlfriend to work in riding office, then fired her and refused to support their baby, lawyers allege."

Two days later, on June 27, Michael Chan and Han Dong held a press conference for **Chinese media** in the office of a community leader, announcing Dong's bid to be the Liberal candidate in Tan's vacated riding.

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