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CANADA

# Trudeau not saying if Han Dong will return to Liberal caucus after testimony

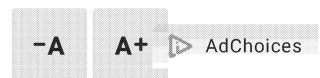


By Touria Izri • Global News

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WATCH: Testimony from independent MP Han Dong at the foreign interference inquiry has revealed whether he knowingly received support from China to help win the Liberal nomination during the 2019 federal election. Dawna Friesen looks at what Dong revealed; and Mercedes Stephenson explains how Prime Minister Justin Trudeau is responding to questions about whether Dong could return to the Liberal caucus.



Prime Minister **Justin Trudeau** did not say whether he would allow former Liberal MP **Han Dong** back into caucus, after Dong testified at Canada's inquiry into foreign election interference that he wants back into the party.

"Obviously these are ongoing conversations that we need to take seriously, and we are," said Trudeau at a housing announcement in Toronto Wednesday.

The prime minister also dodged questions about whether his view of Dong has changed, after a CSIS intelligence summary was made public at the inquiry alleging Dong discussed the imprisonment of the "Two Michaels" with a Chinese envoy, as first reported by Global News.

China detained Canadians Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor in late 2018, widely seen as retaliation for the arrest of Huawei executive Meng Wanzhou. The "Two Michaels" were released in 2021.



The summary describes Dong's recorded phone conversation with the Chinese envoy including his alleged thoughts on how any action from Beijing in the matter of the imprisoned Canadian men could be viewed by the public and the Liberals' political opposition.

The document, primarily created by CSIS, is described as an "incomplete" intelligence summary and its allegations have not been proven. It alleges Dong speculated that freeing the pair right away would bolster opponents of the Liberal government.

Dong testified that he didn't recall making these statements and said the information in the summary "didn't make a lot of sense". He also maintained that he has always advocated for the release of the "Two Michaels". He is

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Trudeau would not comment on the CSIS summary, but instead said he wanted to “reinforce to everyone that our expert non-partisan panel looking at the 2019 and 2021 elections confirmed that those elections happened in way where integrity held, where the outcome was decided by Canadians.”

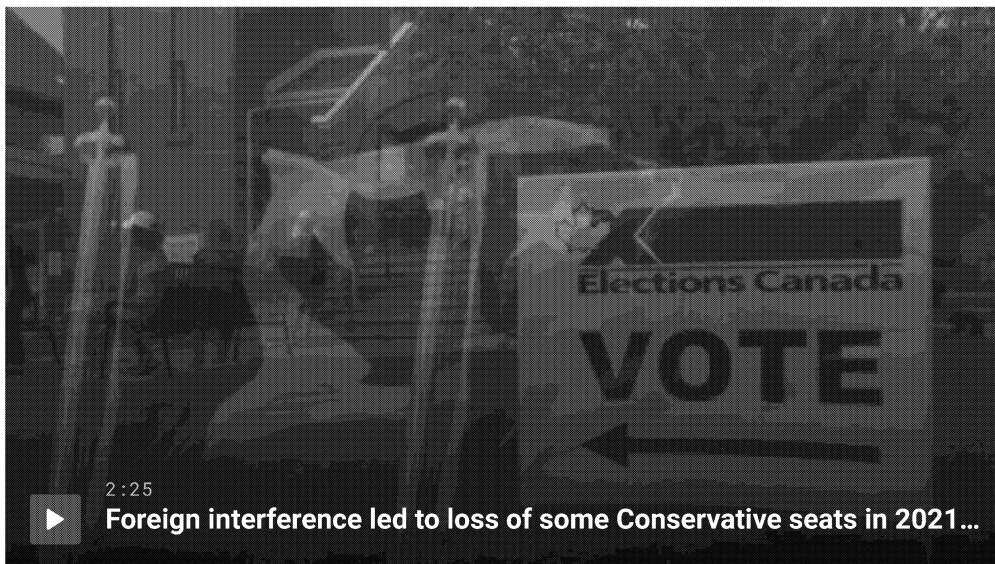


The prime minister dismissed testimony by his former Conservative rival Erin O’Toole on Wednesday that Chinese interference cost the Tories as many as nine seats in the 2021 election.

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“I can understand where someone who lost an election is trying to look for reasons other than themselves for why they lost an election,” Trudeau told reporters.

At Wednesday's hearing, O'Toole described a "campaign of misinformation on social media, but also even in person" to "intimidate voters" and dissuade them from voting for the Conservatives because of their "stronger" criticism against China's policies.



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O'Toole told the commission those nine seats would not have won him the election, but that he believes they could have allowed him to stay on as leader.

A 2021 report by the Security Intelligence Threats to Elections Task Force (SITE) – a federal committee including representatives from CSIS, Global Affairs Canada, the Communications Security Establishment and RCMP – was presented to the inquiry. But O'Toole said it was not brought to his attention at the time.

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“In fact, we were raising instances of foreign interference that we witnessed, and the SITE committee tended to downplay them, and we were given the impression that there were no concerns,” he said.



One of the races O’Toole said China targeted was in the Vancouver-area riding of Steveston-Richmond East, which has a significant Chinese Canadian community. Conservative Kenny Chiu won there in 2019 but lost it in 2021.

Another declassified report shown at the inquiry said government security officials had “identified what may be a People’s Republic of China (PRC) influence operation aimed at discouraging Canadians of Chinese heritage” from supporting the Conservatives and Chiu.

“We do not have clear evidence of a PRC-directed operation, but we have observed strong indicators of a coordinated campaign,” it reads.

Chiu says he did not see this document until the commission showed it to him.

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“I’ve been betrayed. That’s how I see it,” said Chiu. “It’s almost like I was drowning. And they are watching. And the best they could do, by the way, is to let me know that I’m drowning.”

New Democrat MP Jenny Kwan and Conservative foreign affairs critics Micheal Chong also testified at Wednesday’s inquiry.

Both are vocal critics of China’s human rights record and received briefings from CSIS over concerns the Chinese government was targeting them.

*-with files from the Canadian Press*

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