



Statement of Anticipated Evidence: Han Dong

Han Dong, Member of Parliament for Don Valley North, was interviewed by Commission Counsel on February 21, 2024.

Notes to reader

- Commission Counsel have provided explanatory notes in square brackets to assist the reader.
- This summary contains information that relates to the Commission's mandate under clauses (a)(i)(A) and (B) of its Terms of Reference. Information provided during the interviews that relates to other aspects of the Commission's Terms of Reference has been omitted from this summary, but may be adduced by the Commission at a later stage of its proceedings.

1. Background

- [1] Han Dong is the Member of Parliament for Don Valley North. He was elected to the House of Commons in 2019 as a member of the Liberal Party of Canada. He was reelected in 2021. He currently sits as an independent.
- [2] Mr. Dong's father immigrated to Canada in 1989 as an international student and sponsored his family's move to Canada the next year. Mr. Dong remembers arriving in Canada on September 23, 1990. He attended high school and university in Canada. At university, he got to know Liberal organizer Ted Lojko and started getting involved in Liberal politics.
- [3] After helping the campaigns of Maria Minna and Mario Silva, he worked for Ms. Minna's office. He was recruited to work for Ontario MPP Gerry Phillips in 2005, staying until Mr. Phillips' retirement, in 2011.
- [4] In 2013, Mr. Dong won the Liberal nomination for the provincial riding of Trinity-Spadina. He was elected to Queen's Park in 2014, and was the first MPP born in mainland China.

As a Parliamentary Assistant, he worked on international education strategy, poverty reduction, and consumer protection legislation, among other things.

- [5] After losing his seat in 2018, Mr. Dong took time to consider his next steps and did some consulting with a home-security start-up. In 2019 he successfully sought the Liberal Party nomination for Don Valley North and was elected to Parliament.

2. Relationship with Michael Chan

- [6] Mr. Dong first met Michael Chan in 2007, when he was asked to work on Mr. Chan's byelection campaign in Markham by the Liberal Party. Mr. Dong later worked for Mr. Chan for approximately three months when Mr. Chan was a Minister. After Mr. Dong was elected as an MPP, he knew Mr. Chan as a colleague, and they would attend many events together in the Chinese-Canadian community. From time to time, they would have dim sum to catch up and talk about what was happening in the Chinese-Canadian community. Mr. Chan is older than Mr. Dong, so the relationship from Mr. Dong's position was one of respect for Mr. Chan. The relationship between Mr. Chan and Mr. Dong was more professional than personal.
- [7] In 2015, Mr. Dong, Mr. Chan, and others travelled together on a delegation to China led by Premier Wynne.
- [8] In the winter of 2018-2019, after Mr. Dong lost his seat as an MPP, he was invited by the Honorary Consulate of Cambodia to take a trip to Cambodia, which he attended with Mr. Chan and other businesspeople.
- [9] Mr. Dong has only a limited relationship with Michael Chan now. They see each other at community events occasionally.

3. The 2019 election in Don Valley North

- [10] In June 2019, Mr. Dong was surprised to learn that Don Valley North MP Geng Tan would not be running for reelection. Mr. Dong was encouraged by several people to seek the Liberal Party nomination. Mr. Dong recalled being at a fishing tournament the day Mr. Tan announced he would not seek re-election. When he got back from fishing

around 3 p.m., he had missed several phone calls. His wife and several political contacts (Ted Lojko, Elizabeth Betowski, Michael Chan) called to tell him about Mr. Tan's withdrawal from the race and encouraged Mr. Dong to run. After consulting with his family, his mentors, and others, he decided to run for the nomination.

- [11] Mr. Dong knew that Bang-Gu Jiang was also going to run for the nomination. He knew Ms. Jiang. In 2015, when Mr. Dong was a sitting MPP, she had asked for his support in a nomination contest against Kenny Wen. Mr. Dong attended one of her events and she was thankful for the support and for his advice.
- [12] In 2019, Mr. Dong expected Ms. Jiang would rely on strong support from the Chinese-Canadian community, as she had in her [unsuccessful] 2015 campaign. Don Valley North is roughly 35% Chinese-Canadian. Mr. Dong's strategy was to split the Chinese-Canadian vote with Ms. Jiang but gain an edge in supporters from other communities (Tamil, Muslim, Iranian, Armenian, Filipino).
- [13] Mr. Dong had an experienced campaign team. It included Jonathan Tsao, Tom Allison, Matt McDougall, Liz Betowski, Ted Lojko, and Sophia Qiao (Mr. Dong's wife). Mr. Dong said that, as veteran campaign organizers, they understood and followed the voting rules.
- [14] Michael Chan did not play a significant role in Mr. Dong's campaign but he did throw his support behind Mr. Dong by coming to Mr. Dong's public announcement of his candidacy and by canvassing for Mr. Dong on one or two occasions. Explaining Mr. Chan's limited involvement in the campaign, Mr. Dong said he felt that Mr. Chan was probably in an awkward position because he (Mr. Chan) had a close relationship with Bang-Gu Jiang. Mr. Dong had heard from Ms. Jiang's campaign that Mr. Chan was offering her his support too.
- [15] Mr. Dong and Ms. Jiang agreed they would keep the nomination contest civil. Mr. Dong did not recall any major issues during the nomination campaign, other than a complaint about some campaign material from Ms. Jiang's side that showed her with PM Justin Trudeau. Mr. Dong questioned whether it improperly suggested that Mr. Trudeau had endorsed Ms. Jiang, but he could not recall how the issue was resolved.

The nomination vote

- [16] Mr. Dong explained that there are strict rules that govern who can vote in a nomination contest. The voting is restricted to registered members of the Liberal Party. New members can vote only if they are signed up before the cut-off date, which is around two weeks before the nomination meeting at which voting takes place. Eligible voters must be 14 years old, Liberal Party members in good standing, and an ordinary resident of Canada. They must show proof of residency in the riding. To vote, a member must be on the list of eligible members created by the Liberal Party. If someone is not on the list, they cannot show up and vote unless the returning officer from the party permits it. (For example, the person might claim to have signed up before the cut-off and been incorrectly excluded from the list.)
- [17] Mr. Dong's campaign rented a bus on nomination day to transport party members to the nomination meeting. His recollection is that there was one bus, a coach that his wife rented. She reported this as a campaign expense. This is a normal practice in campaigns: a campaign will send out flyers or "door-knockers" to members, asking them to come out to vote and notifying them that a bus will be available for transportation. Mr. Dong's campaign called and distributed these "door-knockers" to voters to tell them that transportation would be available to transport them to the nomination meeting. Mr. Dong was not certain about who exactly received the notifications about the bus, and whether it was only members who his campaign anticipated would vote for Mr. Dong, though he recalls that they included residents of apartment buildings for seniors. Ms. Jiang's campaign also offered some form of transportation to the nomination meeting.
- [18] Mr. Dong has been involved in many campaigns, and offering transportation to voters is in his experience a very common practice. It is a way that candidates can bring out concentrations of voters from condos, apartment buildings, retirement homes, etc. Any party member who shows up for the bus is allowed to take it, no matter who they intend to support.
- [19] The nomination vote was held at the Armenian Community Centre on Hallcrown Place. Mr. Dong spent most of the day outside the venue shaking hands with those who had

come to vote. Mr. Dong said this is a critical role for a candidate. He considered any time not spent shaking hands to be time wasted.

- [20] Members of Mr. Dong's campaign team and Ms. Jiang's campaign team acted as scrutineers. They were entitled to challenge the credentials of those who wished to vote. All decisions were ultimately made by the Liberal Party representatives who ran the nomination meeting.
- [21] Mr. Dong also recalls that in the leadup to the nomination meeting, organizers from the Liberal Party had told Mr. Dong's campaign that he would be listed first on the ballot, and Bang-Gu Jiang would be listed second. Since some of the seniors who supported Mr. Dong and received transportation assistance from Mr. Dong's campaign had difficulty reading or speaking English, Mr. Dong's campaign team advised them that Mr. Dong would be first on the ballot to facilitate their ability to vote. However, about one hour after the polls opened, Mr. Dong's campaign team learned from voters that he was listed second on the ballot. Mr. Dong's team then confirmed with the scrutineers that he was listed second, contrary to the Party's prior information. This troubled Mr. Dong's campaign team and contributed to his team's concern that they may not have enough votes to prevail—many of the seniors who supported Mr. Dong advised that they had voted for the person who was first on the ballot, Mr. Dong's opponent Ms. Jiang.
- [22] After voters began to arrive, Mr. Dong's team also believed he might lose based on their tracking of who they had signed up and who was turning out for the vote. In the end, Mr. Dong won by a very close margin.
- [23] Asked about the allegation of irregularities with the nomination vote mentioned in Independent Special Rapporteur David Johnston's First Report, Mr. Dong said he would like to know what they were. When he learned about the allegations of irregularities in late February 2023, he spoke to some people on his campaign, looking for information about what had happened. None of them had observed anything irregular.

International students participating in the campaign and voting in the nomination contest

- [24] Mr. Dong believes that involving international students as volunteers in a Canadian election campaign is a beneficial experience for them. Mr. Dong said that international students from PRC in particular have never participated in an election in their country and that doing so in Canada gives them a sense of our democratic process and a “taste of democracy”. He estimated there might have been 200-300 volunteers in his nomination campaign and 500-600 in the general election campaign. Mr. Dong’s campaign does not ask if a volunteer is an international student and he cannot quantify how many of his volunteers were international students. To his knowledge, none of them received any payment or other compensation for volunteering.
- [25] Mr. Dong has not seen anything to indicate that international students volunteering on his campaign were influenced by foreign actors, and he did not believe they were vulnerable to foreign interference. He said he trusts Canadian politicians not to be influenced. In any event, the tasks assigned to international student volunteers are low level, such that they would not be able to influence policy. He said volunteers are generally not experienced, face language barriers, and do not tend to know much about the political process.
- [26] His campaign kept data on prospective voters. Volunteers would know about the addresses of some party members if they were involved in canvassing. Mr. Dong did not know about all the databases and information kept by the campaign, or who would have access to it, but he did not think volunteers would have access to much voter data. He said his campaign team was protective of its data.
- [27] Mr. Dong could not confirm if international students could be eligible to vote in the Liberal nomination contest. Assuming that international students were eligible to vote in a nomination contest, Mr. Dong did not think there was a risk they could be subject to foreign interference. Mr. Dong said it would be very difficult for foreign governments to give directions to a group of people without that coming to light, and he did not know what kind of leverage a foreign government might have over foreign students. He said that student visas are granted by Canada. He had never observed or heard that

international students were influenced by a foreign government. Mr. Dong did not think that allowing foreign students to vote in a nomination contest was a potential vulnerability. Anything is possible, but Mr. Dong had never seen any indication of foreign influence over foreign students. There was no evidence it was a risk, in his view.

[28] Mr. Dong said his campaign did not do background checks on volunteers, international or otherwise, but campaign staff screen volunteers carefully because there is a risk they have been sent from the opposing campaign to gather information.

4. Communications with consular or other officials from PRC

[29] Mr. Dong said that, as an MP, it was quite common for him to communicate with diplomats, citing the example of the Ukrainian delegation, with whom he has been in frequent contact at times. He did not believe he needed authorization from the government to do so. He was a backbencher and did not speak on behalf of the government, nor did he believe he would be perceived as speaking on behalf of the government.

[30] Mr. Dong has not had significantly more communications with PRC diplomats than with diplomats from other countries that he communicates with. Every phone call with the Consul General was pre-arranged by his office and the Consul General's office. Sometimes a staff member from Mr. Dong's office would sit in on the call and create a brief memo, which would be passed on to GAC [Global Affairs Canada]. At other times, he would take phone calls alone. During the Chinese New Year, there would be greeting calls.

[31] Mr. Dong said that the job of a diplomat is to influence others in the interests of their country. In his conversations with diplomats, he was looking to do what was in Canada's interests. In his communications with consular officials, he would say nothing that was confidential. Mr. Dong said that when he spoke to PRC diplomats, he would bring up the "Two Michaels," and would advocate for their early release and for better conditions. When the Consul General would compare their detention to the detention of Meng Wangzhou, Mr. Dong would push back, saying there was no fair comparison to be made. He said the Ambassador at one point suggested to him that the improvement in

the conditions in which the Two Michaels were held was contributed to by the advocacy of Mr. Dong and Senator Paul Massicotte (co-Chairs of the Canada-China Legislative Association). Mr. Dong said he also spoke up for Canadian values by asking questions of diplomats in 2019 about the Hong Kong protests. Mr. Dong said he never felt pressured during the discussions.

[32] Mr. Dong and his wife both have family in China. He has never heard of any pressure being brought to bear on them nor has he felt such pressure because of his family in China.

[33] Mr. Dong said that his interactions with Chinese and other diplomats came down to the demographics of his riding. For example, when relations between Canada and China were difficult, and especially at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, Mr. Dong's constituents felt they were targets of discrimination. They expressed those feelings to Mr. Dong. The treatment of the Chinese diaspora in Canada was a common interest between Mr. Dong and PRC consular officials.

5. United Front Work Department

[34] Asked about the **United Front Work Department (“UFWD”)**, and the characterization of it by Canadian security officials as a foreign influence tool of the Chinese Communist Party, Mr. Dong said he struggled to understand the definition of foreign interference. He questioned how foreign interference could be carried out in a way that would change votes on the ground.

[35] Mr. Dong said that, to his knowledge, he has not met a representative of the UFWD. He has read stories about organizations having connections with the UFWD. He was aware that foreign diaspora groups that travel to China are received by departments that he understands fall under the UFWD, but he has seen no evidence of the UFWD operating anywhere in Canada.

6. Resignation from the Liberal caucus

- [36] Mr. Dong resigned from the Liberal caucus in March 2023, in the wake of reporting about an alleged leak of a purported conversation between himself and the Consul General during which Mr. Dong was alleged to have suggested the PRC extend the detention of the “Two Michaels”. He has strongly denied the allegations. Mr. Dong also objected to having had his conversations as a Canadian citizen and MP recorded.
- [37] Resigning from caucus following this allegation was a very difficult decision, but Mr. Dong felt his presence in caucus was creating a huge distraction for the Liberal Party and for Parliament and that he could fight back better as an independent.
- [38] Even though Mr. Johnston [the Independent Special Rapporteur on Foreign Interference] concluded that the allegations about Mr. Dong in respect of the “Two Michaels” and the allegation that he was a witting affiliate of China’s election interference networks were false, Mr. Dong continues to feel the repercussions of these allegations. He is still out of caucus and feels his colleagues in the House do not look at him in the same way. Mr. Dong knows he has not done anything wrong. He has felt isolated because of the allegations and feels that some of the reputational damage is permanent, though he has been supported by his family, constituents, and other current and former parliamentarians. He said the controversy has discouraged people of minority backgrounds from getting involved in our democratic process. They are scared.
- [39] Mr. Dong questioned the motivation behind the intelligence leaks alleged in media reporting, asking whether the goal could be to undermine the government or to cast doubt on certain ethnic groups in Canada.