



Stage 1 Interview Summary: Kenny Chiu

Kenny Chiu, former Member of Parliament for Steveston-Richmond East (Conservative Party of Canada) was interviewed by Commission counsel on February 26, 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] In the 1950s, Mr. Chiu's father fled mainland China and settled in Hong Kong. His mother was born near Beijing and grew up in Shanghai. Mr. Chiu was born in Hong Kong.
- [2] Mr. Chiu is fluent in Cantonese, Mandarin and English. Cantonese is his first language and Mandarin and English are his second languages.
- [3] In 1982, Mr. Chiu left Hong Kong for Winnipeg, Manitoba, to complete Grade 12 as an international student.
- [4] After high school, he moved to Saskatoon and studied at the University of Saskatchewan, graduating from College of Engineering with a Bachelor of Science degree in Computational Science in 1987.
- [5] After receiving a Bachelor of Science, he returned to Hong Kong in 1987. He received a Canadian permanent resident visa in 1989 and returned to Saskatoon with his parents. In Saskatoon, he worked as a software engineer.

[6] In 1992, he moved to Richmond for work.

2. Early involvement in politics

[7] In the late-1990s, Mr. Chiu joined the Reform Party of Canada. He began volunteering with the Reform Party's Richmond Riding Association as its financial secretary. Mr. Chiu has been a member of a conservative political party in some form since this time, through to the current **Conservative Party of Canada (CPC)**.

[8] In the 2000 federal election, he was the Joe Peschisolido election campaign communication director who won the Richmond riding for the Canadian Alliance.

[9] Throughout the 2000s, Mr. Chiu was a frequent commentator on British Columbian Mandarin and Cantonese TV and radio. He provided a conservative perspective and was sometimes critical of PRC policies.

[10] Mr. Chiu first ran for office in 2011 as a trustee on the Richmond School Board. He served in that position from 2011 to 2014.

[11] As soon as he became a public figure, Mr. Chiu started receiving support and encouragement from Chinese Canadian organizations. For example, in 2011, the **Canadian Alliance of Chinese Associations (CACA)**¹ gave him a plaque and invited him to a ceremony to congratulate him on becoming a Richmond School Board trustee. CACA's leaders said they would help spread the word about him in the Chinese Canadian community.

[12] After his election as a trustee, the Consulate-General of the **People's Republic of China (PRC)** in Vancouver also reached out to him. When he was no longer a trustee, the Vancouver Consulate stopped inviting him to events and all communication stopped, with one exception (see further below).

¹ The Canadian Alliance of Chinese Associations is an umbrella organization for individual Chinese Canadian benevolent / community associations

3. The Steveston-Richmond East electoral district

- [13] Historically, Richmond has welcomed immigrants from all over, including the Netherlands, Japan, Ukraine, mainland China, Hong Kong, India and the Philippines. While it is home to a major Chinese diaspora community it is also very ethnically diverse. It is also geographically expansive as an urban riding. In terms of industry, there is fishery, farming, a high-tech sector, retail, warehousing and industrial operations.
- [14] There are Chinese Canadian small businesses who care about taxation and lowering crime. “Law and order” is important to them. There are many people in the area who need help with immigration issues.

4. Running for the CPC in Steveston-Richmond East in 2015

- [15] Mr. Chiu acclaimed into the CPC nomination for and ran as a CPC candidate in Steveston-Richmond East in 2015. He lost the election to Joe Peschisolido who ran for the Liberal Party.
- [16] Among the Chinese Canadian community, he mostly campaigned in the Cantonese speaking community. He was less known in the mainland China community but was supported by leaders of CACA and the **Canadian Community Service Association (CCSA)**.²

5. Meeting with the Consulate-General of the PRC

- [17] In late 2018 or early 2019, Mr. Chiu met with the Consul General of the PRC in Vancouver, Liu Fei. He told her the PRC should have continued Deng Xiaoping’s approach of China keeping a lower profile internationally, opening to the West and building bridges with western democracies like Canada. He was critical of some the things the PRC was doing. This was his only meeting with the Consul General.

² Like CACA, the Canadian Community Service Association is an umbrella organization for individual Chinese Canadian benevolent / friendship associations.

6. The 2019 federal election

- [18] After winning the nomination contest, Mr. Chiu defeated the incumbent MP Joe Peschisolido in the 2019 election.
- [19] Although in 2019 he was worried about China's position towards Hong Kong, he did not put Hong Kong at the forefront of his campaign or in his platform. He believed there were much larger issues in Canada to deal with. However, while he did not actively criticize the PRC's Hong Kong policy during the election, he shared his view on this issue when asked about it.
- [20] Mr. Chiu went door knocking five to seven days a week. He also had volunteers door knocking for him. His door knocking experience was very positive. People realized he spoke their language and understood their issues. Many people made donations and took lawn signs.
- [21] In general, he did not sense any difference in attitude or treatment by people on doorsteps or in the media in 2019 compared to 2015. He was invited to speak on Chinese language media and given the same exposure and treatment as the other registered political parties.
- [22] Mr. Chiu stated he did not receive as many donations or other form of support from the mainland Chinese Canadian community as he did in 2015. Leaders in the mainland Chinese Canadian community now mostly stayed away from him. He was no longer invited to CACA, CCSA or individual Canadian Chinese benevolent / community association barbeques.
- [23] He also saw some negative social media posts about him. One example is a screenshot of a WeChat thread criticizing him.

7. Events after the 2019 election

8.1 Trip to Hong Kong

- [24] One day after he was sworn in as a Member of Parliament in 2019, he flew to Hong Kong as an invited international observer of the Hong Kong District Council elections.

[25] On his return to Canada, people began asking him why he was supporting the Hong Kong “rioters”. One of his key campaign organizers told him that one of his volunteers had asked why Mr. Chiu supported the “rioters” and that they would not volunteer for him anymore.

8.2 The PRC on Parliament’s radar

[26] After the 2019 election, issues involving the PRC came up in Parliament, including Michael Chong, CPC Member of Parliament for Wellington-Halton Hills, tabling a motion in the House of Commons about the PRC’s treatment of its Uyghur minority (“Motion”) on February 22, 2021. The Motion said the PRC engaged in actions consistent with genocide and called on the International Olympic Committee to move the 2022 Olympic Games out of Beijing if the Chinese government continued the genocide. The Motion also called on the Government of Canada to officially adopt this position. The Motion passed.

[27] In February 2021, Erin O’Toole, the leader of the CPC, appointed Mr. Chiu as vice-chair of the Sub-committee on International Human Rights of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

[28] When Mr. Chiu joined the Sub-committee, it had already finished its study on the human rights situation of Uyghurs in Xinjiang, China, but had not yet published the report. At Mr. Chiu’s suggestion, the Sub-committee subsequently released the report in English, French and Mandarin (“Uyghur Report”).

[29] The House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development presented the Uyghur Report in the House of Commons on March 12, 2021. The Uyghur Report concludes atrocities against Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims in Xinjiang amounted to crimes against humanity and genocide as defined in the 1948 *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*.

[30] On March 27, 2021, the PRC sanctioned the Sub-committee collectively and Michael Chong individually. Mr. Chiu interpreted this as meaning he – as a member of the Sub-committee – would be at risk of arrest or disappearance if he went to China, even though he had not been named by the PRC individually.

8.3 The Foreign Influence Registry

- [31] On April 13, 2021, Mr. Chiu introduced a private member's bill, Bill C-282, *An Act to establish the Foreign Influence Registry* in the House of Commons.³ The Bill was co-sponsored by the CPC's national security critic. The Bill aimed to create a foreign influence registry but did not advance past second reading.
- [32] Work on the Bill began in 2020, when Mr. Chiu asked his staff to look at the United States' *Foreign Agents Registration Act* (FARA), which requires registration of foreign lobbyists in the United States. Later in 2020, he directed his staff to switch focus to the Australian model as Australia's system is much more like Canada's.
- [33] Mr. Chiu's goal with the registry was to ensure transparency about attempts at political lobbying in Canada by foreign states. The Bill did not infringe any person's right or freedom to advocate politically but required registration of these activities if done on behalf of a foreign state. Bill C-282 did not specifically mention any country.
- [34] As a Member of Parliament, Mr. Chiu regularly solicited feedback from his constituents. After he introduced Bill C-282, he received some messages saying he was a racist and anti-China, but in the context of all the feedback he received, these did not seem out of the ordinary.
- [35] About a month after he tabled Bill C-282, he heard rumours about a narrative circulating on Chinese-language chat threads that he was anti-China and anti-Chinese.

8. The 2021 federal election

- [36] Twenty-three months after the 2019 election, Mr. Chiu lost his riding to the Liberal Party candidate, Parm Bains. Between the 2019 and 2021 elections, his share of the vote decreased by eight percentage points, which was contrary to trends across the country showing increases in total votes for the CPC.

³ Bill C-282, *An Act to establish the Foreign Influence Registry*

[37] Mr. Bains who won the election is not ethnically Chinese and, according to Mr. Chiu, had no existing connection to the Chinese Canadian community in Steveston-Richmond East.

9.1 Foreign interference as a factor in Mr. Chiu's election loss

[38] Mr. Chiu says foreign interference by China was a significant factor in his 2021 election loss. Chinese language social media labelled him a "race traitor" and white supremacist supporter. Authoritative articles about him circulating on Chinese language social media said he was anti-China and that if he were elected discrimination against Chinese Canadians would increase.

[39] In Mr. Chiu's view, at the very least, the PRC interfered by omission. By this he means, because the PRC wanted him to lose the election, it did not take any steps to reduce or eliminate the misinformation spreading on Chinese language social media about him. The Chinese government has control over social media in China and so, according to Mr. Chiu, it could have stopped the misinformation if it so desired.

[40] However, Mr. Chiu asserts it is likely the PRC went further and deliberately mischaracterized or falsified narratives about: (1) what Bill C-282 would do; (2) Mr. Chiu's intentions with respect to creating a foreign influence registry; and (3) Erin O'Toole as a racist.

[41] Although foreign interference by China was a significant factor in his election loss, Mr. Chiu acknowledges it was not the only factor. Other factors likely contributed to the outcome. The election took place in a very politically polarized climate after the pandemic, especially in relation to government measures to counter COVID-19 and anti-Asian sentiment. His party leader was branded as a white person who hated Chinese people and picked on China. Also, because of concerns over COVID-19, there was less door knocking during the campaign and a lower overall voter turnout.

9.2 Mr. Chiu's campaign experience on the ground

[42] During the election campaign, polls showed he was in the lead but, according to Mr. Chiu, he was getting negative feedback from his constituents, as compared to 2019. People, who were receptive to his message, only 22 months earlier and before the pandemic,

were now angry with him when he and his volunteers knocked on their doors. People who took lawn signs in 2019 would not even speak to him. People shut doors in his face. The overall response was a refusal to engage with him. He also had even fewer people of mainland Chinese origin volunteering with his campaign.

9.3 Mis- and disinformation about Mr. Chiu and the CPC

- [43] Since most of Mr. Chiu's campaign leadership staff did not speak Cantonese or Mandarin, they were not immediately aware of the mis- and disinformation messages circulating about him on social media. Eventually, Mr. Chiu learned about these messages well into the campaign when his campaign volunteers took screenshots of the messages and sent them to him.
- [44] In addition to social media messages, there was an anonymous article published in a Chinese language newspaper based in Toronto, *Today Commercial News*, with disinformation about him.⁴ The article stated that he introduced Bill C-282 to suppress the Chinese Canadian community. Mr. Chiu says this was circulated in the Chinese Canadian community at a time when there was already a lot of fear because of an increase in anti-Asian sentiment as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. *Today Commercial News* did not speak to him before or after it published the article.
- [45] When he began to see the mis- and disinformation about him in September 2021, he and his campaign manager attempted to respond with a media blitz to set the record straight. However, his messaging was not getting picked up or circulated by Chinese-language media outlets. Ultimately, his efforts failed to counter the negative narrative about him circulating among the Chinese Canadian community in his riding.

⁴ *Today Commercial News*, "Conservative MP Chiu introduced the Registration of Foreign Forces Bill to Suppress the Chinese Community" (September 9, 2021) [CCC0000217].

9.4 Attempts to counter mis- and disinformation

- [46] Mr. Chiu's campaign posted videos on YouTube, in Cantonese and in Mandarin, to try to counter the narrative that he was anti-Chinese and was trying to suppress the Chinese Canadian community. These did not receive many views.⁵
- [47] Mr. Chiu held a Chinese language press conference, but only Fairchild TV [a Canadian Cantonese language specialty channel] attended and he does not know if it ever reported on anything he said at the press conference.
- [48] He repeatedly reached out to all Chinese language media, and not only did they not come to his press conference (other than Fairchild TV), but, according to Mr. Chiu, they did not cover him during the election campaign.
- [49] While Mr. Chiu described the media shunning of him as pronounced during the campaign, he stated a shift in attitude toward him began in or about February 2020, when he stopped receiving invitations to comment on AM1320 or Fairchild TV and Radio. These were media on which he had formerly been a frequent commentator. In February 2020, previously unknown people replaced longtime political commentators on Fairchild.
- [50] Mr. Chiu's treatment by Chinese language media was different from their treatment of his Liberal Party opponent. For example, during the campaign his opponent had an in-studio interview and profile on Vancouver Chinese Radio. Mr. Chiu was never profiled, even though one of the co-founders of the station knew him and had his personal contact information.
- [51] One of Mr. Chiu's contacts at AM1320 told him that the owner of that radio station had instructed staff not to mention Mr. Chiu or invite him onto their programs.
- [52] Because he was not getting any exposure on Chinese language media, he turned his focus to English language media, which then reported on the mis- and disinformation story.
- [53] According to Mr. Chiu, community organizations like CACA and CCSA also shunned him. He no longer received invitations for meetings with them or their leaders. People who

⁵ See <https://youtu.be/Q5OhtBMVf7g> and https://youtu.be/E_MHH6-1Zyw

previously supported him refused to take his calls, did not respond to his messages and would not meet with him.

[54] Despite this, Mr. Chiu and Alice Wong, the CPC incumbent for the other Richmond riding, were able to organize a meeting in September with influential Mandarin speaking seniors in the Richmond Chinese Canadian community. The meeting was about 7 to 10 days before the election and went on for several hours.

[55] At the beginning of the meeting, the seniors were very afraid and emotional, saying they and their families would be discriminated against because of Bill C-282, because Mr. O'Toole was a racist and because Mr. O'Toole and Mr. Chiu were anti-Chinese.

[56] Mr. Chiu explained in Mandarin that the leader of the CPC intended to protect Canadians from foreign attacks and uphold Canadian values internationally. He told them about his deep Chinese cultural roots and how he considered himself ethnically Chinese. Mr. Chiu felt he got his message across to the seniors. After they left, he recalls telling Ms. Wong that everything would be fine and not to worry about what they considered to be mis- and disinformation campaigns against them.

[57] Only one or two days after this meeting, people began sending him pictures of the same seniors he and Ms. Wong had met with, standing beside Mr. Chiu's Liberal Party opponent at the opponent's campaign office. Mr. Chiu was shocked. From this point forward, the person who had helped Mr. Chiu organize the meeting, a retired professor who taught in the PRC and who Mr. Chiu understands receives a PRC pension, would not respond to his calls or texts or any messages through intermediaries, even though he had previously been very supportive of Mr. Chiu's candidacy.

[58] Mr. Chiu thinks it is strange that people who held conservative values like him and who largely supported him in the 2019 election were in 2021, less than two years later, campaigning for someone they did not know from a political party with less conservative values.

9.5 Reporting the problem

[59] Mr. Chiu's campaign leadership escalated the mis- and disinformation issue to the CPC central campaign in early September. Mr. Chiu heard after the election that one of the

CPC representatives [Walied Soliman] attending the government's **Security and Intelligence Threats to Election Task Force (SITE TF)** meetings during the election raised the issue to SITE TF and received no response. SITE TF did not contact Mr. Chiu.

[60] During the election campaign, Mr. Chiu reported the problem to the **Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS)** and asked them for help. CSIS did not tell him anything or offer any assistance. They requested printed copies of the screenshots of the mis- and disinformation and then he never heard from them during the election or afterwards, until receiving a CSIS briefing in the Fall of 2023.

9.6 No other contact with government agencies tasked with national security or election integrity

[61] Other than Mr. Chiu reaching out to CSIS, he had no direct contact with any government agency tasked with national security or election integrity during the election. SITE did not contact him. Neither did Elections Canada or the Panel of Five responsible for implementing the **Critical Election Incident Public Protocol (CEIPP)** during federal elections.

9. Complaint to the Commissioner of Canada Elections

[62] The **Commissioner of Canada Elections (CCE)** received a complaint involving foreign interference in Mr. Chiu's campaign, but he did not file this complaint and does not know who did. He understands the CCE is investigating it.

10. Foreign interference in elections

[63] Mr. Chiu believes foreign interference happens daily in Canada. During election campaigns it is done in a coordinated and organized way.

[64] CACA and CCSA use their member organizations to promote narratives the PRC wants people to believe about China. For example, CACA bought full page ads in Canadian Chinese language newspapers, celebrating PRC passing the National Security Law in

Hong Kong. Mr. Chiu questions whether China is funding such efforts, given the cost of buying such advertising space.

[65] Mr. Chiu also believes foreign interference with Canadian elections occurs through PRC control and influence of Chinese language media. This started before the 2021 election and continues today.

11. Political discourse in Parliament ahead of the 2021 elections

[66] Mr. Chiu is concerned about the politicization of allegations of foreign interference. For example, he recalls in the House of Commons during the 43rd Parliament, that some Conservative MPs, including him, brought up concerns about China, including its refusal to supply personal protective equipment during the COVID-19 pandemic and the Winnipeg microbiology lab controversy. According to Mr. Chiu, Conservative MPs were accused of being racist when concerns about China were brought forward. This was personally insulting to Mr. Chiu.

[67] Mr. Chiu noted that calling opponents anti-Chinese or racist is a PRC tactic that the PRC uses around the world in response to criticism. He is concerned that political opponents perpetuated false narratives and used the same attacks as the PRC, which then laid the foundation for PRC mis- and disinformation to spread. According to Mr. Chiu, this is what happened in the 2021 election.