



Interview Summary: Michael Chan

Michael Chan, former Ontario MPP and Cabinet Minister in the Ontario Liberal Government, was interviewed by Commission Counsel on February 20, 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] Michael Chan has worked in the insurance industry since 1975. He became involved as a volunteer for the Liberal party at the provincial level (in Ontario) and at the federal level. He was elected to the Ontario legislature in 2007 and held several cabinet posts in his time as an MPP. Mr. Chan retired from provincial politics in 2018 and did not hold any elected position until he was elected as a regional councillor in Markham in October 2022, becoming Deputy Mayor.

Before assuming political office.

- [2] Michael Chan immigrated to Canada in 1969. He married in the 1980s and has two sons and a grandchild.
- [3] Beginning in 1975, Mr. Chan began working in the insurance business with Canada Life. He later started his own brokerage firm with partners. He remains the owner of an insurance brokerage.

- [4] In 1984, Mr. Chan was approached by Bill Yee about volunteering to assist the campaign of John Roberts, who was running for the leadership of the Liberal Party of Canada against John Turner and Jean Chrétien [among others].
- [5] Mr. Chan felt that he was well liked in the campaign, that he had good people skills, and knew a lot of people, from the insurance business.
- [6] Mr. Chan said he has helped with campaigning—including fundraising and knocking on doors—for over 40 MPs and MPPs in the ensuing years. He named a number of Liberal politicians he had helped, including: Bob Wong, Sheila Copps, Paul Martin, Michael Ignatieff, Justin Trudeau, David Peterson, Jim Peterson, Brian Wilford, Bill Graham, and John McCallum. He said he had helped politicians in election campaigns, but that after the elections, he did not tend to interact with them.
- [7] Mr. Chan said he had helped Justin Trudeau by knocking on doors and introducing him to members of the Chinese community, but that he had not seen him otherwise, except at a distance at public events.
- [8] Mr. Chan noted that while it has been suggested that his main contribution was as a fundraiser, he felt that his bigger contribution was door knocking, because he knew from his work in the insurance industry how to communicate with people.

[Holding elected office in Ontario.](#)

- [9] In 2006, a sitting MPP [in the Ontario riding of Markham (as it then was)] resigned unexpectedly. Mr. Chan said he was asked to run for the seat. He was reluctant, and proposed several other candidates, but it was made known to Mr. Chan that he was the preferred candidate. He agreed to put his name forward and was elected in a provincial by-election.
- [10] After being elected, Mr. Chan was named the Minister of Revenue. In the ensuing years, before his retirement from provincial politics in 2018, Mr. Chan held several cabinet portfolios in the governments of Dalton McGuinty and Kathleen Wynne, including Minister of Revenue, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport, and Minister of International Trade.

- [11] When COVID-19 hit in 2020, Mr. Chan was travelling in southeast Asia.
- [12] In 2022, Mr. Chan was elected to City of Markham council and, in November 2022, named Deputy Mayor. Mr. Chan's interest in municipal politics arose after he saw the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on seniors and learned that housing for seniors was a municipal responsibility.

2. Relationship with Han Dong.

- [13] Mr. Chan became acquainted with Han Dong over the years prior to when Mr. Dong was elected MPP in 2014. Mr. Chan noted that both Mr. Dong and his wife worked in the provincial government before Mr. Dong's election.
- [14] In the years leading up to 2019, Mr. Chan did not speak to Mr. Dong very often. Their work concerned different ministries. They would run into each other from time to time. Mr. Chan did not recall having much, if any, of a social relationship with Mr. Dong. For example, he could not recall ever having a private sit-down dinner with Mr. Dong. He described Mr. Dong as a "casual acquaintance." He said he was more like a political colleague than a close friend.

3. The 2019 election in Don Valley North.

The Liberal Party of Canada nomination contest in Don Valley North.

- [15] Mr. Chan said he was not heavily involved in the 2019 federal election campaign. He was travelling frequently (eight times between November 2018 and October 2019) to Cambodia trying to set up a business—a "certification centre" for goods going in and out of the country. Mr. Chan said he returned to Canada regularly, citing his obligations as a governor of Seneca College.
- [16] Mr. Chan was surprised when he learned on the radio in June 2019 that Liberal MP Geng Tan would not be running again in Don Valley North. Upon learning the news, he thought Han Dong would be an "almost perfect" candidate for that riding, except for the fact he lived downtown. Mr. Chan felt that Mr. Dong had experience in politics and

excellent language skills in English, Mandarin, and Cantonese. Don Valley North is a heavily Chinese riding, and those language skills were important. Mr. Chan noted that it can be difficult for politicians after they lose an election, and he thought that Mr. Dong would be interested to get back into the political arena.

- [17] After learning of the vacancy, Mr. Chan phoned Mr. Dong regarding his interest to run. He recalled that Mr. Dong was on a fishing trip. It was the afternoon. He told Mr. Dong that Geng Tan had announced he would not be running in Don Valley North. He understood that a lot of people had phoned Mr. Dong to encourage him to run for the nomination, and Mr. Chan felt he should consider running too.
- [18] Mr. Dong ultimately ran against Bang-Gu Jiang for the Liberal nomination in Don Valley North. Mr. Chan said he knew Ms. Jiang better than he knew Mr. Dong. She ran for the Liberals in 2015, and he had helped her campaign. Mr. Chan knew Ms. Jiang's husband, Thomas Qu, who was the chairperson of the Chinese Professionals Association of Canada. Mr. Chan was not very close with Ms. Jiang, but he would see her at community events. Ms. Jiang worked as a lawyer and may have referred Mr. Chan insurance work. Mr. Chan said that Mr. Qu solicited his support for Ms. Jiang, but Mr. Chan declined.
- [19] Mr. Chan backed Mr. Dong over Ms. Jiang because he felt that Mr. Dong would be a stronger candidate based on "merit and personal observation." Mr. Dong had experience in provincial government, including as an MPP, and he "knew politics." In contrast, he felt that Ms. Jiang might not be able to attract voters as readily.
- [20] Mr. Chan said he played very little role in the 2019 campaign. To the best of his recollection, he went door knocking only once for Mr. Dong during the nomination campaign. He recalled being at Mr. Dong's campaign office for about an hour, though he was unsure if this was during the nomination contest or after Mr. Dong secured the Liberal nomination. Though his involvement was minimal, he did not understand the nomination contest to be particularly contentious.
- [21] Mr. Chan did not recall being present for the actual nomination vote, though he was not certain he was not present. He did not recall any complaints about irregularities in the

nomination vote. He added, however, that it was very common for there to be allegations of irregularities in party nomination contests. He said people are always “pointing fingers” when their candidate loses.

The 2019 general election campaign.

[22] Mr. Chan played a minimal role in the general election campaign in Don Valley North. He does not believe he had any formal role in the campaign. Mr. Chan was in Cambodia during much of the election period. He thinks he attended the opening of Mr. Dong’s campaign office, near Steeles and Leslie. He said he may have gone door knocking for Mr. Dong once during the general election campaign, as a courtesy.

4. Involvement in other campaigns in 2019.

[23] Asked about whether he was ever named as the co-chair for Mary Ng’s campaign in 2019, Mr. Chan said someone had put his name down for the position and that it was an “honourary thing”. He said that when asked about taking on such positions, he usually says yes. He was, however, in Cambodia during most of the election period and wasn’t involved in Ms. Ng’s campaign.

[24] He could not recall being involved in other campaigns in 2019. He said he may have had some limited involvement in Jean Yip’s campaign. His role was always knocking on doors. He did not participate in the management of any campaign.

5. Involvement in the 2021 federal election.

[25] In 2021, the only candidate Mr. Chan helped was Leah Taylor Roy [Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill], whom he assisted by door knocking on her behalf.

[26] He does not recall speaking to Mary Ng at all in relation to her 2021 campaign.

6. Contact with PRC consular officials or other PRC officials.

- [27] Mr. Chan was invited to share any information he had about his contact with consular officials or other officials of the **People's Republic of China ("PRC")**.
- [28] He indicated he would run into consular officials quite a bit at public events, with hundreds of attendees.
- [29] When he was a Minister in provincial government, he and the Premier would usually meet with the consul general. Mr. Chan and government staff also met with the deputy consul general or consul, which was about five times a year or less. A lot of the discussion was about international trade, visas and invitation letters for incoming and outgoing business delegates and travelers. Mr. Chan traveled to China frequently in his capacity as a cabinet minister. This included going over together with either Premier McGuinty or Premier Wynne, as well as on other occasions such as with the Minister of Agriculture and Tourism Toronto. When a Chinese delegation would visit, he would be expected to attend because of his Chinese background.
- [30] Asked where he would draw the line between appropriate and inappropriate contact with consular officials, Mr. Chan said that most of the meetings were at public events, and his conversations with PRC officials were about business, community, trade and immigration. He said, "I had a position and had a job to do, and I did my job." He said he felt he did a very good job for the government and was able to make many deals around trade, immigration, and tourism. Had he stayed away from consular officials, the deals would not have happened. He did not think anything came up that was inappropriate.
- [31] Asked if anything changed for him after he read the media reporting as far back as 2015 alleging his involvement in foreign interference, Mr. Chan said the stories in the media did not change his approach in terms of his communications and contact with consular officials. He still had a job to do and he just did his job. Referring to the news reporting, Mr. Chan said that either the Canadian Security Intelligence Service was doing a bad job or the newspapers were misinforming people.

[32] Mr. Chan said that he met Zhao Wei with deputy consul general Zhung, in relation to his business in Cambodia. Mr. Chan had asked for an introduction to the Chinese Ambassador to Cambodia, Ambassador Li, to help with his Cambodian business. Mr. Chan was a private citizen at the time and had no knowledge of Mr. Zhao's background.