



Stage 1 Interview Summary: Michael Chong

Michael Chong, Member of Parliament for Wellington-Halton Hills (Conservative Party of Canada) was interviewed by Commission counsel on February 15, 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 Chong is the member of Parliament for Wellington-Halton Hills. He is a member of the **Conservative Party of Canada (“CPC”)** and was first elected to the House of Commons in 2004. He entered the federal cabinet of Prime Minister Stephen Harper in 2006, and served as president of the Queen's Privy Council, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister for Sport.
- [2] He currently serves as Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs for the Official Opposition.

1.1 Life before politics

- [3] Mr. Chong was born in Windsor, Ontario to parents who were immigrants to Canada. His mother immigrated from the Netherlands. His father immigrated from Hong Kong. He has extended family living in both the Netherlands and Hong Kong. He grew up in the electoral district he represents in Parliament and currently resides there.

- [4] Prior to his election to the House of Commons, he worked as Chief Information Officer for the National Hockey League Players' Association and as a senior consultant to the Greater Toronto Airports Authority for the redevelopment of Pearson International Airport. He has also worked in information technology in the banking sector. He attended Trinity College in the University of Toronto and holds a degree in philosophy.

1.2 Riding of Wellington-Halton Hills

- [5] Wellington-Halton Hills is a federal electoral district located in southwestern Ontario, half of which is in the Greater Toronto Area. It is largely a rural riding, the biggest town of which is Georgetown. There is no significant Chinese Canadian community in his riding.

2. Experience with People's Republic of China

- [6] Mr. Chong closely follows events in Hong Kong, based on his portfolio as shadow foreign affairs minister and his family ties. He observed that Hongkongers enjoyed greater liberties – freedom of association, freedom of expression, economic freedoms – until Xi Jinping became President.
- [7] Mr. Chong explained that his assessment of China changed under President Xi's increasing authoritarianism. The government of PRC has long been a communist government. Until President Xi, it was an authoritarian state but there was hope for growing liberalization and the expectation that the PRC would gradually open up.

3. Consequences of his criticisms of PRC government

- [8] People have occasionally approached Mr. Chong about speaking out against the PRC government, but he understands that his constituents want him to speak up on such issues as Huawei, Hong Kong, the 'Two Michaels', the plight of the Uyghurs, and other PRC activities.
- [9] Prior to taking on the role of Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Chong noted some incidents that seemed to correlate with his criticisms of the PRC government. On

August 23, 2019, he received a spoof email received from a Gmail account purporting to be from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of PRC indicating he was barred from entering Chinese territory.¹ Although he knew almost immediately that it was a spoof email and not actually from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, he nevertheless took it very seriously. He characterizes it as a threatening email as it stated that a note would be sent about him to other Asian countries. He understood this to suggest that he could be extradited to China if he travelled to such countries. The email is significant, as it is the first incident he could recall of possible foreign interference. While the email was a spoof, it was similar to the eventual ban on him entering the PRC announced on March 27, 2021. Mr. Chong contacted the office of Chrystia Freeland (then-Minister of Foreign Affairs) and provided them with the email. He never heard back from them. He lamented that there is no protocol for such situations and likened his situation to “twisting like a plastic bag in the wind”.

- [10] In September 2021, during the general election, Mr. Chong participated in an online all-candidates meeting in his riding organized by the Optimist Club in Puslinch township. During the meeting, he received questions with what Mr. Chong described as pro-PRC government leanings from a man with a discernable Mandarin-inflected accent. The unidentified man’s questions had two themes: 1) that Mr. Chong was responsible for creating anti-Chinese racism and discrimination, accusing him of being “anti-China”, and identifying that even people like MP Han Dong have said the same; and 2) that the Conservative Party’s policy on China was blindly following US policy, and whether, as a Canadian, he thought that Canada should have its own independent foreign policy. Mr. Chong characterized this as an “incident”, given (1) no one seemed to know who this intervenor was, (2) it was not certain if he lived in the riding, and (3) the nature of the questions. Efforts were made to ascertain the identity of this man and determine if he lived in Puslinch township, but those efforts were not successful. There was no recording of the meeting available and there was no list of names of attendees. He does not know whether this incident constitutes foreign interference, but he reported the incident to the RCMP.

¹ MMC0000004.

[11] In an email dated December 14, 2023, the RCMP indicated that they had concluded their investigation into these matters, and that, while the information was “compelling”, it was “not actionable”.²

4. 2021 Election Postmortem

[12] During the 2021 election, Mr. Chong stated that he and the CPC were aware of irregularities potentially associated with foreign interference happening in a half-dozen or more ridings affecting the CPC campaigns. There was a lot of misinformation, for example, that if the CPC were elected, they would “force Chinese to register” or that Canada would sever relations with the PRC if Erin O’Toole became Prime Minister. Mr. Chong observed that the CPC vote count dropped precipitously in 2021 in certain ridings with significant Chinese-Canadian communities, where it had been “pretty consistent” in previous general elections.

[13] Mr. Chong stated he was aware that “something odd” was going on in Kenny Chiu’s riding of Stevenson-Richmond East, a riding with a high number of Chinese-Canadian electors. Mr. Chiu told him that voters in his riding were not answering the door during campaign door-knocking efforts and were not willing to chat.

[14] It was not until months after the election that Mr. Chong became aware that **the Rapid Response Mechanism (“RRM”)** in Global Affairs Canada was tracking in real time the disinformation campaign against Mr. Chiu and the CPC’s election platform. He characterized as “tragic” that the RRM was documenting the disinformation targeting Mr. Chiu during the 2021 election but did not release any information to the public regarding the existence of these disinformation operations during the campaign. No information was released by the panel administering the Critical Election Incident Public Protocol about this disinformation, either. Mr. Chong identified an additional two independent reports – one by the Atlantic Council³ and the other by Canada Research

² MMC0000008.

³ CCC0000119

⁴ CCC0000120

Chair Benjamin Fung⁴ – that concluded the PRC was very likely behind this disinformation campaign.

[15] Shortly after the 2021 election, Mr. Chong and other party members – Kenny Chiu, Alice Wong and Bob Soroya – met with Chinese Canadians in the Greater Toronto Area and BC’s Lower Mainland in roundtable-type events. The purpose was to solicit the views of Chinese Canadians about the CPC and its policies. He stated that the feedback was “pretty shocking”. He heard from a participant who reported that two hosts on Vancouver radio station AM 1320 were instructed by the station’s ownership not to mention Mr. Chiu’s name on air. He was told that one of them nevertheless interviewed Mr. Chiu and was terminated as a result. The other person mentioned Mr. Chiu’s name on air and had his hours cut. Mr. Chong observed that some people were reluctant to talk to him and his roundtable co-hosts.

[16] Mr. Chong stated that, in his view, the PRC has a greater presence on the ground than the Government of Canada itself in many Chinese-Canadian communities.

[17] Mr. Chong rejects the notion that PRC electoral interference had no effect on the election results. One factor in Erin O’Toole’s ouster as CPC leader was that the party did not gain seats in the election.

5. Flow of Information

[18] With respect to the flow of information related to foreign interference in the 2019 and 2021 general elections, Mr. Chong expressed deep concerns that nothing was done to notify him of the threat of foreign interference until media reporting came out in May 2023. He was not informed of anything. The briefing CSIS provided him was generic in nature and there was nothing in it he did not already know. There was no mention of specific threats.

[19] Had Mr. Chong known during the 2021 election what he knows now, he would have taken preventive actions such as recording the Zoom call in the Puslinch all-candidates meeting.

[20] His other concerns about the flow of information regarding foreign interference in the 2019 and 2021 elections relate to local party nominations, which he believes require greater scrutiny. He observed that both the CPC and the **Liberal Party of Canada (“LPC”)** have minimal criteria for voting in local party nomination contests (payment of minimal membership fee, be at least 14 years of age, be a resident of the riding). The main difference is that CPC nomination voters must be citizens or permanent residents whereas the LPC allows “ordinarily resident” party members to vote. He believes that these loose criteria make party nominations ripe for foreign interference.