
Han Dong-hoon, Busan Buk-gu Gap: A Record of the 100 Days Before and After the Election (Mar. 26-Jul. 3, 2026)

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Prologue. A Single Line of Address

April 14, 2026

Mandeok 2-dong Administrative Welfare Center in Buk-gu, Busan. A moving-in notification form was placed on the counter. It was Tuesday, April 14, 2026, as spring was deepening. An administrative welfare center is a small neighborhood government office that handles local affairs, issuing copies of resident registrations and processing various notifications. The people who stand before these counters each bring their own stories—a new home, a new school, a new workplace.

Since a moving-in notification is simply the procedure by which someone who has moved puts their new address on the country's official register, it's just an ordinary document that anyone who moves fills out. Yet this day's document soon became national news. That was because the applicant's name was Han Dong-hoon.

Two and a half months earlier, on January 29, the People Power Party expelled this man who had once led the party. Expulsion is a decision to remove a person's name from the party roster and send them out of the party. For a politician, a political party is both a name tag and a fence. It provides nominations, assigns an organization to run elections together, and lends weight to the person's words. A politician who had served as Minister of Justice and leader of the People Power Party lost that name tag and became someone belonging to no party.

To run in an election again, he had to stand as an independent without borrowing the name of any party. He was in a position where he had to bear the weight of every word and every step entirely on his own. The man who greeted spring outside the party stood before a civil application counter in Buk-gu, Busan on this day, and from that day on, his address on the official resident register became Mandeok, Buk-gu, Busan. It was the day a name once called out in the thick of Seoul politics was written down as a single line of address in a Busan alley.

After completing the filing, he stood before reporters and wrote on Facebook that day: "I will raise a 'southeastern wind of conservative reconstruction' in Busan. I will do politics in Buk-gu, Busan until the end." Busan lies to the southeast when viewed from Seoul. He surely meant to whip up a wind in a coastal city to the southeast and rebuild a conservative politics that had collapsed. Conservative reconstruction was a message aimed at the entire nation, while the vow to do politics in Buk-gu, Busan was a promise made to a single neighborhood.

A national politician and a neighborhood resident—the two identities he sought to become were overlapped within those two sentences. Another post uploaded that same

day spoke in a quieter tone. "I am Mandeok resident Han Dong-hoon. I will go with you to the end in this beautiful place." Even to political battles in Seoul, he answered from Busan. Seeing multiple people cornering a single prosecutor, he wrote, "Call me, the Minister of Justice at the time. I'll come up from Busan anytime."

In that single phrase "come up," where his feet were actually planted was made clear.

Welcome came in the form of a piece of bread. That day, a short post was uploaded to his account saying he had received a salt bread as a gift from a Mandeok neighbor. He called the person who handed him the bread a fellow citizen. Suspicion came in the form of a word. According to his post, Representative Jeon Jae-soo of the Democratic Party of Korea referred to this move as "cat burglary." It meant targeting and moving into a house left empty after its owner had departed.

He countered, "Buk-gu, Busan is a 'citizens' house,' not a 'politicians' house.'" For voters who had repeatedly experienced politicians visiting their neighborhood only during election season, it was a suspicion understandable enough to harbor. The neighborhood's feelings upon greeting an unfamiliar celebrity could hardly have been unanimous.

Several paths must have laid before the expelled politician. He could have stayed in Seoul and waited for the right moment, or he could have stepped back from politics altogether. He chose to move to Busan. Words can be changed at any time, but resident registration remains on record. It appears to have been a choice by which he cut off one path of retreat for himself. Filing a moving-in notification takes only half a day, but the time it took to resolve to submit that single document could not have been that short.

The next day, he wrote, "This is my first election. I will go from start to finish in Busan." Even after serving as minister and party leader, standing before voters with only his own name on the ballot was a first for him at fifty-three.

A month later, on May 15, he registered as an independent candidate. In the National Assembly by-election for Busan Buk-gu Gap held on June 3, he was elected with 35,056 votes. His vote share was 42.96 percent, while candidate Ha Jeong-woo of the Democratic Party of Korea received 33,664 votes, or 41.26 percent. The difference between the two was 1,392 votes, or 1.70 percentage points.

On June 5, he entered the National Assembly for the first time as an independent lawmaker, and on June 22, he introduced his first bill, an amendment to the Board of Audit and Inspection Act. These events unfolded across exactly 100 days, from March 26—sixty-nine days before the election—to July 3, thirty days after the election.

That single line of address on the moving-in notification left behind a question: Does a person who moves their address become a resident, or a candidate? Even after he left after

completing the filing, the counter would have welcomed the next visitor just like any otherday. It was a spring day when a hand offering a salt bread and the word "catburglary"coexisted in the same alley. The answer was held not by the person who submitted thepaper, but by the neighborhood that received it.

Chapter 1. Spring After Expulsion

March 26–April 9, 2026

On March 26, 2026, a commemorative post was published on Han Dong-hoon's Facebook page. It paid tribute to the 46 fallen sailors of the ROKS Cheonan, sacrificed in the West Sea 16 years earlier. He singled out Warrant Officer Han Joo-ho, who died during the rescue operation, and wrote that the 55 heroes who gave their lives defending the West Sea were heroes of the Republic of Korea. He stated that the country must be one that never hesitates to remember heroes who have become stars, and never falls short in honoring the heroes who remain beside us.

The sentences were neat, and the text ended with a promise: "I will build such a Republic of Korea." In the same post, he pointed out that the word 'hero' was nowhere to be seen in the slogan for the first West Sea Defense Day under the Lee Jae-myung administration, arguing that a government that doesn't remember its service members as heroes isn't a proper government. Even outside the party, his tone remained that of a public official.

On the same day, another post with a completely different tone appeared on the same account. The opening line was rough: "Scared, completely scared." It was a post about the ongoing parliamentary investigation into the withdrawal of indictments. According to his post, Representative Park Sung-joon of the ruling Democratic Party of Korea, who served as the senior committee member for the investigation, drew the line on calling him as a witness during a radio broadcast that day. Han fired back, asking why they had even started such a parliamentary inquiry if "190 ruling party lawmakers were going to get scared of me alone and run away en masse."

These were two posts uploaded by one person on a single day. One bore the diction of a memorial address; the other, the language of a brawl. On one side stood a former party leader speaking of the country with words of honor and dignity; on the other stood an unaffiliated politician shouting at the ruling party, asking if they were scared. Both were the same man. In the spring of 2026, Han Dong-hoon was living between those two voices.

At the time, he was outside the party. Two months earlier, on January 29, the People Power Party expelled its former leader, Han Dong-hoon. Prosecutor, Minister of Justice, People Power Party Emergency Response Committee Chairman, Party Leader—all his titles had become past tense. The only present tense left was his own name and his Facebook account. Without a seat in the National Assembly, he had no podium in the chamber; without a party, he had no spokesperson and no organization. Two months after his expulsion, he was neither lawmaker nor minister nor candidate.

It was his first spring outside the party. During these fifteen days, not a single post offered a lengthy reflection on the past two months. Expulsion was mentioned only in passing when snapping back at others' remarks. He described his situation like this: "I'm a single individual who was expelled, facing 1 to 190, so what are you so afraid of that you're running away?" A 190-seat ruling party and a single politician with no party affiliation—that was how he described the standoff in numbers.

At the center of the battles he fought around this time was the parliamentary investigation into the withdrawal of indictments. The Democratic Party's request for the inquiry, which he attached for view, stated that it aimed to investigate allegations of systematic intervention by the Ministry of Justice's leadership chain in the investigation of the SBW Group remittance case to North Korea. He had been the Minister of Justice when that investigation took place.

He argued that the accomplices had already been convicted by the Supreme Court, claiming the investigation itself was ground-laying work to withdraw indictments in President Lee Jae-myung's cases. Day after day, he demanded that they summon him as a witness. He promised to take the witness oath and accept punishment for perjury, asking whether he—the very minister who oversaw the passage of President Lee Jae-myung's arrest motion—wasn't the exact person who should be called out.

According to his posts, the Democratic Party's reasons for rejecting him changed every day. One lawmaker said he couldn't appear because he was under investigation; another said he couldn't because he had no responsibility to take; and a senior committee member claimed that if he appeared, it would turn into a mess. He also noted that Representative Seo Young-kyo, chair of the special committee, called him the "architect" of manipulation, and Representative Choo Mi-ae called him the "principal offender." He demanded to know why they called him such names yet refused to call him as a witness.

The party that had ousted him was also entangled in this back-and-forth. According to his account, Representative Na Kyung-won of the People Power Party initially voiced the view that his appearance as a witness wouldn't be helpful. Four days later, on March 31, the People Power Party requested him as a witness. On that day, he wrote: "Today, the People Power Party requested me as a witness for the parliamentary inquiry into indictment withdrawals. Thank you." It was a sentence expressing gratitude for a decision made by the party that had expelled him.

When Representative Suh Bum-soo of the People Power Party posted questioning how the special committee could adopt over a hundred witnesses while leaving out the one they called the 'principal offender,' Han shared that post. The party that ousted him and the former leader who was ousted briefly stood on the same side, separated only by a single

witness stand. The witness stand was the only path into the National Assembly chamber for a politician outside the party, and even that door depended on someone else's hands.

In the fifteen days between March 26 and April 9, he published over fifty posts. Some days saw just a single entry, while others reached ten. More than twenty of them concerned the brawl over the parliamentary inquiry. His opponent changed every time, but his demand never shifted: call me in. Rare were the days he lowered his voice. On April 6, he went as far as announcing plans to file criminal complaints against two lawmakers for spreading false information.

Reading the posts repeating the same demand for nearly two weeks, one senses both grievance and a competitive drive. It showed a refusal to sit back while conclusions about him were drawn in his absence. For a politician outside the party, there must have also been a keen awareness that silence meant being forgotten. Keeping his name in the dead center of the fight—that was virtually the only tool left for a lone individual.

On March 27, tucked between fighting posts, was an announcement: "I'll be appearing on tomorrow's premiere episode of SNL's new season at 8 p.m. Saturday. Please enjoy watching!" A man who had been a prosecutor, a minister, and a party leader personally shared news that he would be appearing as a guest on the season premiere of a comedy show. The broadcast aired the following evening.

He wrote, "I was out so I haven't watched it yet, but I hope you enjoyed it," and added that he was even happier to appear alongside an actor he was a fan of. Attached to his reflections was an old song from the movie *Saturday Night Fever*. Yet while claiming "entertainment is just entertainment," he added one key point: "I did it with the mindset that President Lee Jae-myung should listen with a straight face." Though the stage was entertainment, the target was politics.

Judging by the hashtags asking people not to misunderstand that he posted over several days, he seems to have anticipated the commentary surrounding his comedy show appearance. For a politician without a podium in parliament, a Saturday night television stage was one of the few remaining microphones. Around that time, he posted a video of a KBS interview, announced an appearance on a JoongAng Ilbo YouTube broadcast, and on April 5 left a hashtag noting it was the day he filmed SNL in Sinchon.

A politician without an organization had to become a broadcasting station himself.

On March 28, the day the show aired, ten posts were uploaded to his account. Six of them carried hashtags with the names of shops in Busan's Gupo Market: Palpal Fisheries, Punggak Side Dishes, Three-Generation King Jokbal, Wellbeing Raw Fish Restaurant, Anchovy Uncle & Bean Sister, and Kkokji Shop. These were market alley shops with fish,

side dishes, pig's feet, and raw fish in their names. Accompanying them was the phrase Listening to the People Road.

On the Saturday his face was appearing on a TV comedy show, his feet were seemingly walking the alleys of Gupo Market in Busan. That day, Busan flashed past only in six lines of hashtags amid over fifty posts. There was no post explaining why it had to be Busan.

Busan was not the only market. On April 1, he shared posts by close associates who had visited merchants at Gyeongdong Market in Seoul, adding a single line: "We will do our utmost." It was a post reflecting a resolve not to practice politics that leaves when an event ends, but to build relationships with merchants and practice politics of mutual prosperity. The word 'we' remained in the writing of a man who had lost his party. The next day, he made a promise.

"Saturday, April 11 at 1 p.m., I will see you in front of Paldalmun in Suwon on a blossoming spring weekend." It was an announcement that he would meet citizens in front of Suwon's Paldalmun, where five markets, including Jidong Market and Paldalmun Market, are gathered.

His commentaries directed at the government didn't stop either. On March 31, when President Lee Jae-myung mentioned an emergency financial order, Han argued that the current situation did not warrant using extra-legal "economic martial law." On April 3, six posts went up in a single day. One line contained the song title "Cherry Blossom Ending," and in the evening, he announced a live broadcast, saying it had been a while; the hashtags in that post jumbled an April song, SNL reviews, and the illegal parliamentary investigation together on a single line.

On the same day, he posted a lengthy piece questioning President Lee Jae-myung for halting the Special Act on Building Busan into a Global Hub City, asking, "Is spending money on Busan's development really that much of a waste?" He noted it was a bill he had insisted must pass while serving as Emergency Response Committee Chairman and Party Leader of the People Power Party. A single line of a flower song and a letter of protest for Busan flowed side by side on the same screen on the same day.

His sharp words weren't aimed solely at the Democratic Party. On April 5, he posted a one-line entry: "'Deserter' Hong Joon-pyo has finally 'surrendered'." It was a cold mockery, all the colder for lacking any lengthy explanation of what incident triggered it. Expulsion had been decided two months prior, but the fighting and vacuum within the conservative camp before and after that expulsion remained present tense in this spring.

On April 8, the door to the witness stand still did not open. According to his posts, Democratic Party lawmakers were still making excuses not to call him, while he was still

demanding to be called. A single line from his posts easily became news headlines, and the lawmakers' responses in turn became material for his next posts. Words traveled far. But neither the adoption of witnesses nor the schedule of the parliamentary inquiry was something he could decide. The words of a politician without a party affiliation resonated loudly, but had yet to decide anything.

What remains for someone who has lost an organization? What remained for him this spring was his name and his words, a single account to carry them, a few people he could call 'we,' and two feet capable of going anywhere. His demand to be called as a witness remained unanswered, and the promise at Paldalmun in Suwon had yet to reach its date. On April 9, a video was uploaded showing where those feet had landed.

It was a video filmed the day before in Mandeok, Busan, meeting students from Baekyang Middle School. The neighborhood was called Mandeok. The doors to Seoul's meeting rooms rarely opened, but the alley outside a school in a southern city stood open. His footsteps were leaning little by little toward the south.

Chapter 2. I Found a Home in Mandeok

April 10, 2026–April 19, 2026

On April 13, 2026, a short post was uploaded to Han Dong-hoon's Facebook page: "Not long ago, I found a home in Mandeok, Buk-gu, Busan." Only two sentences followed. "It's the quiet, livable place where I met middle school students on their way home. I will live for the citizens of Busan." He didn't mention what kind of home it was or when he would move in. Instead, a video was attached.

It was a video shot in an alley in Mandeok five days earlier, on April 8—a record of his encounter with Baekyang Middle School students heading home after class. The story about the house ended in a single line, and the rest was about the neighborhood and its people.

His itinerary that day remains in a Monthly JoongAng interview article he shared later. After finishing an interview in Sangam-dong, Seoul, on the morning of April 13, he took a 1 p.m. train down to Busan. The article reported that this interview was his first official schedule after deciding to run for Busan Buk-gu Gap.

In this interview, stating that conservatives had to cross the sea of tedious martial law and impeachment, he said, "I will steer the ship that crosses the sea of impeachment," adding that people didn't necessarily have to love the captain. The post about finding a home was written on the very day he took that train south.

The name Mandeok first appeared on his Facebook three days earlier, on April 10. It was a post consisting of nothing more than a few hashtags connecting Busan, Mandeok, name, and "Refusing to go without even knowing the name." It was hard to tell what it meant at the time. Since there was much talk outside about where he would go, it seems he posted a single neighborhood name like a riddle.

On the same day, he posted about calling a high school friend after a long time, mentioning that he enjoyed watching a house-building show featuring his architect friend. The next day, he walked through market alleys in Suwon, Gyeonggi-do. His movements still spanned the nation. Only the two syllables of Mandeok were waiting for an answer in a corner of Facebook.

In the meantime, there was an obituary. On April 11, he posted a long message mourning Kim Jin, an editorial writer who had passed away the day before. He looked back on him as a person who never called when things went well, but reached out with harsh advice only when he was in trouble—someone who took the platform at protest rallies on cold days after his expulsion without giving a single advance call. He wrote that he was sad and

devastated. In that spring outside the party, a name that had stood by his side vanished likethat.

Mandeok is a neighborhood in Buk-gu, Busan. When Democratic Party Representative Jeon Jae-soo, who served as a lawmaker for the Buk-gu Gap constituency to which this neighborhood belongs, ran for Busan mayor, a parliamentary by-election opened up in Buk-gu Gap. The election date was June 3. News that a former Minister of Justice and People Power Party leader was coming down toward that vacant seat became news in itself. To the residents of Buk-gu, he was a face on the news screen until then, not a face encountered in the alleys.

The public gaze wasn't entirely friendly. According to Han Dong-hoon's post, candidate Jeon Jae-soo called this move an "empty-house robbery." It probably meant submitting paperwork first to a house left vacant by its owner. Around that time, the phrase "the toughest of tough grounds" also appeared in his posts. The phrase overlapped both the meaning that it was a challenging neighborhood for a conservative candidate and the suspicion that he had come solely for the election without any ties.

Even on the very day he announced news of his home, his account was not quiet. Pressuring candidate Jeon Jae-soo to disclose whether he had received a Cartier watch, he wrote, "How do you intend to serve as the mayor of the great Busan Metropolitan City with such a faint heart?" Reporting that candidate Jeon Jae-soo had accused him of betraying President Yoon Suk Yeol, he shot back, asking whether Jeon wouldn't stop President Lee Jae-myung if he declared martial law.

He added the claim that candidate Jeon Jae-soo blocked the Busan Special Act for fear of being accused of betraying President Lee Jae-myung. These were all his assertions. In a broadcast response cited in his post, candidate Jeon Jae-soo was saying that one could just wait for the announcement of the investigation results. The dispute over the watch continued for several days afterward. On the screen for the same date, posts pressing about watches and betrayal sat side by side with stories of a home and middle school students.

On April 14, he completed his move-in notification at the Mandeok 2-dong Administrative Welfare Center and officially became a resident of Buk-gu, Busan, on the resident register. Declarations of sparking a southeastern wind for conservative restoration and counters about a "house of citizens" filled his Facebook that day, and regarding the investigation disputes in Seoul, he replied that he could head up from Busan at any time. On the day he finished his move-in registration, the anchor of his words had already shifted to Busan.

The records after the paperwork was completed are somewhat quieter. There was a neighbor who handed him a salt bread roll, and after running into the middle school students he had met in the alley on April 8 again, he left a brief post reading, "Met again." He

also visited Gupo Market after market hours to greet citizens who had worked hard.

The next night, Wednesday, April 15, he joined members of the Mandeok 2-dong Youth Voluntary Crime Prevention Squad for a night patrol. He introduced it as a group with decades of tradition. Walking through every corner of Mandeok with squad members, he distributed voice phishing prevention flyers, writing that public safety in Mandeok was as good as anywhere in the nation, and that credit belonged to the residents who had carried on voluntary crime prevention activities for decades.

At the end of his vow to brag about a safe and livable Busan Buk-gu to the whole country, he attached the words that he would do his utmost with sincerity. The word "sincerity" became a frequent verbal habit at the end of his posts around this time. A joke was tucked into that day's hashtags. In this crime prevention squad, eligibility as a "youth" went up to fifty-two, but he was a fifty-three-year-old resident of Mandeok. It was banter from a new resident who missed being a youth by a single year.

A desire to be accepted as a neighborhood uncle must have bled through. Indeed, starting the next day, he called himself Mandeok Uncle and Buk-gu Uncle.

In the April 15 post from the night of the patrol, there was also a confession that even for someone who had served as a cabinet minister and party leader, this was his first election asking for votes under his own name.

On April 16, he walked through Mandeok Lego Village and stopped by Deokcheon Market. At night, he went up Mandeokgogae Pass with the voluntary crime prevention squad, introducing the pass—home to a crescent moon photo zone—as a truly beautiful place.

It was not yet clear who his opponent would be. During those few days, he questioned why Democratic Party figures were tying their candidacy in Buk-gu Gap to instructions from the president or permission from the party, asking why they didn't ask Busan citizens first. Upon hearing news that party leader Cho Kuk had chosen Pyeongtaek instead of Busan, he wrote that Cho had run away to avoid him. This, too, was his assertion.

On April 16, at a hair salon in Deokcheon Market, he posted a long message. He mentioned that Democratic Party Representative Park Soo-hyun and others had said candidate Jeon Jae-soo's resignation timing might be delayed so that the Buk-gu Gap by-election itself would not be held. Calling this a trick, he wrote: "Next year, in 2028, and in any other election after that, I will continue to run right here in Busan Buk-gu Gap and keep my loyalty to the citizens of Busan Buk-gu Gap."

It meant he wouldn't leave even if this election evaporated. Faced with suspicions that his move was calculated for the election, he seems to have chosen to answer with the duration of time.

In the early morning of April 17, stating that he saw Chairman Kim Hyun-chul's post on his way out to meet citizens, he wrote that he would carry on the dedication and courage of former President Kim Young-sam—the last conservative president born in Busan—right here in Busan. It rained that day. At the rainy Shin-Mandeok Market, he wrote that merchants welcomed him warmly even though business was slower than usual. At the Deokcheon Underground Shopping Mall, he met a victim of the Brothers Home who ran a shoe store and listened to his plight.

Noting that he was asked to make the situation public and seek help, he wrote that protecting the vulnerable is the duty of the state and must be a priority. That night, he went to Deokcheon Station and greeted citizens heading home until 12:30 a.m. when the last subway train stopped running. Explaining that he wanted to accompany them on their weary commute home, he added a gentle reminder to watch out for colds, noting the large daily temperature swing at night.

On the morning of Saturday, April 18, he met citizens near Deokcheon Station and promised to go all the way together right here. He added that he had conducted politics by staking his word on keeping his promises, and that if he broke a promise, he was someone who could no longer do politics. On this day, he also visited elderly residents at the senior center in his apartment complex. In that post, the phrase "our apartment senior center" appears. Just four days after his move-in notification, "our" attached itself in front of his apartment. A message expressing gratitude over the Monthly JoongAng issue featuring his interview selling out was also posted that day.

At 12:30 a.m., entering April 19, he was still at Deokcheon Station. Writing that a mother heading home after finishing her business welcomed him brightly despite being tired, he wrote that he would never forget that look on her face for the rest of his life. The closing greeting of that post was "Sincerely, Han Dong-hoon." In that Sunday post, his pledge to stay and develop Busan to the end appeared once more.

There were two perspectives looking at these ten days. One side looks at the calendar. It sees the sequence where a house appeared as soon as the seat became vacant, and patrols began the night after the move-in notification. It is a view that every move was tuned to June 3. The time elapsed from the day the name Mandeok first appeared to the disclosure of the house, the move-in notification, and the first patrol was barely five days. The other side looks at his footsteps.

He actually transferred his address, walked the night alleys, and stood in rainy markets and in front of stations at the hour of the last train. It is a perspective that even if you cannot look inside a mind, you can count footsteps. The two perspectives looked at the same ten days and counted different things.

By what means does an unfamiliar politician become a neighbor? Paperwork takes a day. A declaration takes a line. Becoming a neighbor takes longer than that. The answer he offered during these ten days was time. He seems to have tried to prove himself by what time he stood in which alley. A salt bread roll, a round of patrol, a greeting at the hour of the last train—these were the units of that proof.

Ten days after the mysterious first hashtag refusing to go without even knowing the name, he was in the process of gaining the single title of Mandeok Uncle. Whether that was enough, no one knew. For the man who had walked through all the nights of Mandeok, the morning of Gupo was waiting this time.

Chapter 3. Morning at Gupo Market

April 20–May 8, 2026

A man walks down the alleyways of Gupo Market in the morning. He bows to greet vendors at their street stalls, holds the hands of elderly residents, and on some days shares a single carp bread. Some locals approach him asking for an autograph. From late April to early May 2026, this was a morning routine repeated nearly every day in Busan Buk-gu. He looped tightly through Gupo Market, Deokcheon Market, the apartment walking paths of Mandeok, and neighborhood senior centers.

On the day he met residents of Mandeok 3-dong on the walking trail of Mandeok Lucky Apartments, he wrote that he would make their neighborhood a better place to live, and at night, a post uploaded from Deokcheon stated that he would do his best for Buk-gu. The daily routine of a politician who used to deal with the entire nation from Seoul had shrunk to fit the width of market aisles, and the phrase 'our neighborhood' appeared here and there in his posts.

On April 26, he ran into a familiar student again. It was the same student who, a few mornings earlier, had said he was late for an exam after chatting with him. He wrote that when he asked if the student had really been late for the test, the boy walked off without answering in the end. The video uploaded alongside the post was captioned 'Late for an exam just to see Han Dong-hoon' and tagged 'Shuttle Civil Complaint No. 1.' It was a lighthearted post with hints of laughter, but the closing was serious: "A school commute shuttle in Busan Buk-gu is absolutely necessary."

A single plea received on the street had thus become his first formal complaint. There was no answer yet, but the problem already had a number attached to it.

Around this time, his Facebook page accumulated like a ledger of his footsteps. Days with over twenty posts were common; on April 22 alone, twenty-nine posts went up, and there were days that topped thirty. He met residents at a hair salon inside Deokcheon Market, ate his first meal of the day with a piece of bread in front of Gunam Station, and talked about authentic Gupo noodles inside Gupo Market. Even eating rice-cake ramen at Mungyeong Rest Area on his way to and from Seoul became a post.

On a day he bumped into the same person three times, he wrote that it wasn't coincidence, but destiny. Elderly folks who had seen short videos of him recognized him first on the street. On April 29, there were only two posts. One of them read: "Met with citizens at Gupo Market today as well. I will do my utmost." At the end of April, an article

title he shared included the expression that he had become a neighborhood older brother in Gupo Market.

Children recognized him first. On April 24, he posted a video, calling it an ID photo taken by an elementary school citizen in our neighborhood. The child in the video asks again and again: Mister, who are you? Where are you from? Do you live here? Really? Really? Students on their way to eat maratang slowed their pace as they followed him around, earning the nickname 'Maratang Boys' in his post. A few days later, a hashtag expressing sadness over parting with those kids was posted.

There were playful moments too, like calling a Gupo Elementary School student a fellow alumnus and describing himself as a 68th-class graduate. On April 27, a slogan mimicking a child's voice—"Mister is Mister Han Dong-hoon"—was added to a post, alongside a video of a child shouting "Mister Han Dong-hoon!" to their parents. On Children's Day, May 5, he wrote: "Children are people one era newer than adults."

A promise followed that he would become a reliable mister who protects the children of Buk-gu.

On that same day, April 26, he met citizens at Solomon Law Park, located in Busan Buk-gu Gap. It is a facility under the Ministry of Justice. He wrote: "Come to think of it, I think this is the first time I've visited an institution under the Ministry of Justice since stepping down as Minister of Justice." He added that, as a former minister, he was grateful that citizens enjoyed the park. The man who once commanded the entire ministry now walked its courtyard as a guest. There was no resentment or lengthy reminiscing in his writing.

Few sentences have measured the distance between a past title and present circumstances with such calm detachment. Four days later, he left a record of visiting the park again, alongside the word 'cotton candy.'

Two days later, he visited merchants at the Gupo Wholesale Livestock Market. He wrote that he was deeply grateful for the warm welcome, that it was an attractive place capable of becoming a landmark of Buk-gu, and that he would help develop it. It was a determination punctuated with exclamation marks. Nor were the merchant stories limited to the wholesale market. The market alleys of Gupo and Deokcheon, as well as local shops like hair salons and pharmacies, were part of his daily route.

On the night of April 22, he held a discussion with residents on Nakdong River development, and announced that he had completed a meeting with parents in Busan Buk-gu Gap on April 20. Transportation, local commerce, and childcare. The questions he received in the alleys piled up day by day, but the answers he offered were still brief, single lines. Turning promises into official documents belonged to a later time.

On paper too, he gradually became a resident of Buk-gu. On April 24, he paid his capital contribution at the main branch of Bukbusan Saemaul Geumgo and became a union member. "Day by day, I will become a real Buk-gu person," he wrote that day. On April 25, he served food at the 104th Senior Citizens' Day event hosted by the Mandeok 2-dong Youth Association. He visited Gupo Elementary School, which has a 119-year history, and walked in the Galmaetgil event where visually impaired citizens and volunteers walked side by side.

In front of the elders of Buk-gu, he took the attitude of a learner. At a senior center on April 20, he wrote that he would practice politics like a son to the mothers of Buk-gu, and on April 30, he visited a senior banquet and the Buk-gu branch of the Marine Corps Veterans Association, leaving word that he felt responsibility toward their support. There was also a day he greeted seniors from the Jangseon Comprehensive Social Welfare Center as they set out on an outing.

On May 2, he posted that he had offered greetings and learned at senior centers in Mandeok and Deokcheon, and that he had listened to inspiring words at Geumsusa and Mireuksa temples in Gupo. Words like 'learned' and 'only on the receiving end' recurred in his posts around this time. For a man roaming the alleys without an organization or party affiliation, the words available to choose from were likely few.

For a long time, the slogan 'Buk-gu Buk-gu Han Dong-hoon' was stamped at the end of his posts. On April 27, a new slogan appeared: 'Buk-gu's Future, All the Way with Han Dong-hoon.' The old slogan didn't vanish right away. The two were used side by side for a while, but as the days went by, the new slogan moved to the forefront. At the market, he also received pleas not to betray Buk-gu and leave.

The question of whether this man would eventually leave followed him like a shadow, and the phrase 'all the way' in the new slogan was likely his answer to that question. His April 21 post began with the sentence, "Buk-gu is the starting point and home of my politics," and continued: "I will not leave Buk-gu. Han Dong-hoon's politics of keeping promises—I will prove it with that."

The May holidays began. On the morning of the first day, he was at Gupo Market again. He wrote that because the market was large, he chose the less frequented sections to walk around and greet people. On the same day, a video of him shadowboxing into the air went up, followed by a behind-the-scenes video. Shadowboxing is solo practice without an opponent. A man who referred to himself in Busan dialect as 'Osipseoi' thrust his fists alone on screen.

That night, he met citizens on Deokcheon Youth Street, and a video of his closing-time greetings outside shop doors was also recorded. May 3 was a rainy Sunday. He met citizens at Gupo Market that day as well, expanding his walk to the area around Hongsamdang

Pharmacy near the bus terminus in Gupo 3-dong.

The following day, he met citizens at the Buk-gu Park Golf Association President's Cup tournament, and at Hwameong Eco Park he welcomed senior politician Kim Young-woo, who had cycled all the way from Seoul to Busan, hosting a livestream together. Videos of students approaching him saying, 'Mister, we go to Sajik High School' were also posted around this time.

During the same period, posts of a different tone appeared on his account. On April 20, referring to Kim Kyung-soo, the Democratic Party candidate for South Gyeongsang Governor, he wrote that for someone who had gone to prison for manipulating public opinion in an election to run again was disrespectful to the public. On May 3, he wrote that if the president caused the charges in his own case to be dropped, it would be clear grounds for impeachment, and promised to block it alongside the public. The person holding hands at the market and the person speaking of impeachment coexisted within a single account.

Greetings in the alleys and arguments aimed at Seoul alternated on the same screen throughout this period.

In his May 5 posts, shop names became the titles themselves: Overlock, Monami, Chungcheong Store. It was a way of calling out the names written on store signboards one by one. On the same day, he waved at passing cars at Sinmandeok Intersection, and left traces of meeting students who had just finished their exams outside a bowling alley. In Gupo 3-dong, a cat became the protagonist of a post.

Early on the morning of May 6, he met commuting citizens and students at Mandeok Subway Station, helped serve meals to seniors at Deokcheon Comprehensive Social Welfare Center, and greeted people at night at Greencore Intersection. On the morning of May 7, he greeted morning commuters at Deokcheon Rotary, and in the evening did the same for evening commuters at Gupodaegyo Intersection. On that same day, he met a 101-year-old resident at Jungri Senior Center—a woman who had married into Mandeok at eighteen and lived there for eighty-three years.

He wrote that he felt deeply moved. On May 8, a post mentioning an interview report by Reuters and another post thanking seniors at Mandeok Comprehensive Social Welfare Center—saying, "I am always on the receiving end"—went up side by side. Questions from an international news agency and hospitality from welfare center elders took place on the very same day for one man.

Voices from the alleys also lingered in his posts. He transcribed the exact words: "I've never voted before, but I'll definitely vote for you this time," and tagged a local-dialect pledge promising to take responsibility for a hundred votes himself. To an elderly resident

who patted his shoulder as they passed, his reply was that he would do really well. Whether the repetition of familiar scenes would translate into votes, no one could say with confidence back then.

During this period, he seemed to choose physical repetition over packaging answers into documents. Getting acquainted came first; binding promises together would follow. That was why the school commute shuttle remained just a complaint number, and the wholesale market's future stood as a single exclamation point. The discussions on Nakdong River development, parents' worries, and requests accumulating every morning—none of them had yet become sentences in a campaign pledge book.

Daily face-to-face greetings and promises not yet put on paper. The distance between the two was not something that could be measured in footsteps.

As Parents' Day passed, the calendar moved toward mid-May. Morning greetings at Gupo Market would continue the next day and the day after that. However, the time for solo practice without an opponent was drawing to a close. Other names hoping for the same votes in the same alleys were soon due to arrive.

Chapter 4. Three Candidates, One District

May 9, 2026 – May 20, 2026

On May 15, 2026, Han Dong-hoon's papers were submitted to the candidate registration desk for the Busan Buk-gu Gap National Assembly by-election. It was the registration of an independent candidate, bearing no party label. Three and a half months after being expelled from the People Power Party on January 29, he was running in an election from outside the party. In the same district, candidate Ha Jung-woo of the Democratic Party of Korea and candidate Park Min-shik of the People Power Party registered, and news reports that day declared it a three-way race.

Since the party that had expelled him fielded its own candidate, there were two conservative candidates in a single district. The three were also new residents of the same neighborhood, to the point that an article listening to public sentiment in Mandeok-dong was published under the headline, 'The Neighborhood Where Ha Jung-woo, Park Min-shik, and Han Dong-hoon Moved In.' Their registered addresses overlapped, and there was only one seat to win. Election day, June 3, was nineteen days away.

On the day he completed registration, he wrote down his resolve. He stated that he was the person who would "shatter the Democratic administration's runaway withdrawal of indictments" and make up for Buk-gu's lost twenty years. "We will make our Buk-gu, Gupo, Deokcheon, and Mandeok—which have always been low priority and always the underdog—the top priority and true leader of South Korea."

He also quoted Democratic Party lawmaker Park Jie-won's statement that "if Han Dong-hoon wins in Busan Buk-Gap, the Democratic Party will be in real trouble," countering that those were accurate words. His statements that this would be a historic election and that he would balance the scales of South Korea appeared in news headlines that day. Words about fighting the regime in Seoul and elevating Buk-gu's standing stood side by side in a single post. Even on registration day, his street greetings did not stop.

In the brief posts from that day, traces remained in texts titled 'Raincoat Twins,' mentions of four-leaf clovers, a story about a Deokcheon Middle School student who crossed the crosswalk on their way to school, and the word 'ice pop' written alongside elementary school students.

The six days leading up to registration were equally packed. On May 9, he wrote that he and his wife met with citizens at a Children's Day event, and on the same day, he held a campaign launch press conference. Headlines reporting the press conference quoted him

saying his victory would be the starting point for checking the administration and rebuilding the conservative movement. The following day, an opening ceremony for his campaign office was held, and the event was broadcast live on video. "In front of the campaign office opening venue.

I will surely win." Along with this brief message, he wrote, "At yesterday's campaign launch press conference, I spoke to our Buk-gu residents. At today's office opening, I will listen to our Buk-gu residents." On the same day, he even visited an outing held by Mandeok Hwanhee Church in Yangsan to greet the pastor and citizens.

Posts continued to pour out. Days with over thirty posts followed one after another, and on May 19 alone, forty posts were published. On that single day of forty posts, senior centers, billiard halls, and restaurants appeared in his writings. He met citizens at park golf courses, participated in serving jajangmyeon at a welfare center, and even visited Guming Station, where foot traffic was light, writing that he would visit every corner of Buk-gu.

At the Gupo 3-dong bus terminus, he pledged to visit every place, and morning and evening greetings continued at key intersections like Pocheon Intersection and Goryeodang Intersection. On one day, at 5:50 a.m., he saw off the Buk-gu branch of the Vietnam War Veterans Association on their way to pay respects at the memorial tower; he stopped by an early-morning Qigong gymnastics gathering at a sports center; and at night, he toured the Gupo 2-dong area from Gupo Bridge to Gunam Station.

Morning commute greetings at Mandeok Station and evening commute greetings at the Gupo Bridge intersection framed both ends of his day, while late Saturday nights found him meeting citizens around Deokcheon Forena and Sukdeung Station. He gave greetings at the general assembly of the Bukbu Beauty Association and the Buk-gu Football Association President's Cup tournament, and wrote that he attended the Night of Our Lady Mass at Deokcheon Catholic Church. Early Saturday morning, he greeted citizens setting off on a trip to Gurye. News reports also appeared noting that he greeted residents with handwritten letters.

The statement that he would make money and people gather there was included in that news headline.

Scenes with people accumulated as well. In front of Namsanjeong Station, he met a citizen who ran over after spotting him from afar and titled it 'Oath of the Peach Garden.' There were traces of receiving encouragement from a bus driver, and a post telling how he went to visit someone to check on them, found them asleep, and waited until they woke up to meet them. Stopping by a cafe in Deokcheon, he wrote that there were warm hearts and delicious bread, promising to deliver good politics, and left behind the sentence, "Whenever I see Buk-gu citizens, I run to them."

Regarding the moment he was leaving Gunam Senior Center on May 14, he wrote: "Children from Gunam Elementary School swarmed around yelling, 'It's Han Dong-hoon!' They even asked me to post them on Reels and Shorts." Videos were also uploaded of children making a point to tell him they had just returned from a field trip. Children do not know political parties. What they recognized were his face and name. In an election fought without a party label, those two were ultimately what he had to rely on.

His posts targeting Seoul remained unchanged. On May 12, he wrote, "Shameless people wearing inspection committee armbands act as hitmen for those in power," and shared a news report about the special counsel requesting an extension of his travel ban, claiming it was explicit election interference. To this were added posts directed at the two other names in the same district.

On May 11, stating that he had agreed immediately upon receiving Busan KBS's proposal for a live TV debate, he issued this request: "I call on candidates Ha Jung-woo and Park Min-shik to confidently accept the live TV debate proposed by Busan KBS." He also shared on-site video titled 'Let's Face Off in Debate.' He appeared on a talk show on local television and gave a walking interview with the Busan Ilbo while strolling along Deokcheon Youth Street.

Requests for a debate were repeated in several subsequent posts, but the local broadcast report he shared noted that a candidate debate was scheduled to take place only once, on May 28.

The ballot numbers were also finalized. Candidates from parties holding more seats in the National Assembly receive earlier numbers, while independent candidates are pushed behind party candidates. Han Dong-hoon's ballot number was 6. On May 16, he posted a short message saying he had embroidered the number 6 onto his vest. The next morning, Sunday, he wrote that he had met citizens going on outings at six locations across Buk-gu, adding an emphasized '6' at the end of the post. The word 'rank' itself had been present even before registration.

The title of a broadcast talk show addressing the lost twenty years was coupled with the phrase 'To South Korea's Top Priority.' Around the time of candidate registration, that phrase became a slogan accompanying almost every post. Alongside the slogans he had been using—'The Future of Buk-gu' and 'By Han Dong-hoon's Side to the End'—new ones accumulated. 'Han Dong-hoon puts Buk-gu first.' The phrase 'Now Buk-gu takes the lead' also tagged along. An independent candidate assigned the sixth ballot position had placed the concept of ranking right at the forefront.

He likely intended to overlap Buk-gu, which had always been relegated to the back, with his own low placement on the ballot, urging everyone to move forward to the very front

together. Standing on Deokcheon Youth Street, he noted that this street, once famous in Busan for its heavy foot traffic, was no longer so, writing that he would overcome Buk-gu's lost twenty years through the reconstruction of Buk-gu.

The candidates of the two major parties had nationwide party organizations behind them. The independent candidate had none. If party candidates set off with a party name, organization, and a familiar ballot number, an independent candidate must fill that empty space with the hands of citizens. Traces of a short post stating that traveling alone as much as possible allowed him to meet more people were left around this time. On May 17, an election campaign committee made up of Buk-gu citizens was launched at his campaign office near Deokcheon Rotary.

He called this campaign "an election campaign where our Buk-gu people take the lead and play the main role." Posts were published pledging that he would never forget the passionate support he received and would repay it by rebuilding Buk-gu and rebuilding the conservative movement. There was also an appeal: "A comeback victory by the acting majority. Please join us!" Later news articles evaluated that supporters and volunteers made up for the independent candidate's organizational weakness.

If there are two conservative candidates, the conservative vote can split. Anyone could do the math showing that the benefit of a split vote would fall to the remaining candidate. This is why the term 'unification'—meaning candidates with similar inclinations pooling their strength behind a single candidate—haunted this election all along. Yet, the unification of conservative candidates ultimately fell through. News reports stated that Han Dong-hoon and Park Min-shik clashed at every turn. Han Dong-hoon's appeal was directed not at his rival candidate, but at the citizens.

"Because Han Dong-hoon is the only conservative candidate who can win, I ask the citizens to unify the conservative candidates of Busan Buk-Gap behind me, Han Dong-hoon." It was a request for citizens to forge unification through their votes rather than having candidates combine votes among themselves. In a radio interview on May 18, he called unification a 'dependent variable.' His thinking was likely that once it became clear who the winning candidate was, unification would naturally follow.

On the same day, he asserted that rebuilding the conservative movement was a process of restoring conservatism's right to speak out again. He asked whether the public would be persuaded if people who defended illegal martial law to the end spoke about the issue of indictment withdrawals, claiming that he, having opposed martial law before anyone else, held that right. A traffic control of forces that would have ended at party nominations in a party-versus-party contest had, in this district, fallen to voters standing before the ballot box.

Even amid that standoff, names from his former party brushed through his posts. In one short post on registration day, only the three letters of the name Bae Hyun-jin remained, seemingly a trace of lawmaker Bae Hyun-jin's visit. On May 19, the names Bae Hyun-jin, Ko Dong-jin, and Park Jung-hoon were written alongside Deokcheon Youth Street. Although the party nomination certificate went to candidate Park Min-shik, it seemed that not all conservative politicians followed that certificate. Even before the votes, footprints were already dividing.

On May 20, rain fell. He made the rounds of Deokcheon Rotary and Deokcheon Underground Shopping Center on a rainy Wednesday, leaving a post stating that the citizens of the Gupo Fishermen's Association operating on the Nakdong River earnestly longed for a new Buk-gu. He also wrote about meeting an elderly woman operating an 89-year-old sewing machine in an alley behind Gupo Market. At night, he posted: "I just greeted citizens at Namsanjeong Intersection late on this rainy evening. I will give my all to Buk-gu."

A pledge to serve with humility and total devotion before the public will was also posted that day. The previous day, May 19, there had been an announcement that he would personally explain his first campaign pledge at the campaign office, and on this day, it was unveiled under the name 'New Buk-gu Plan.' The requests from the alleys were now ready to become formal policy documents. A post from three days earlier had already announced that a campaign launch rally for candidate number 6 would be held on the evening of the 21st at Gupo Market Ssamji Park, covering the park in a wave of white.

Once midnight passes, the thirteen-day official election campaign begins. Three names will now appear on the ballot. Beside two names are party labels; beside one name stand the three letters indicating an Independent. Will the voters of Buk-gu vote for the party, or for the person? The alleys of those thirteen days, where he would go to hear that answer, were waiting just beyond midnight.

Chapter 5. Thirteen Days in the Alleys

May 21 – June 1, 2026

The last train arrived at Deokcheon Station. People who had spent their entire day filed out of the station. On May 21, 2026, the day the official campaign began, Han Dong-hoon was there. He wrote on Facebook that he started his campaign by meeting weary citizens heading home on the last train. Added after that was his vow to devote all his heart to the citizens of Buk-gu. A post uploaded that same day contained a single line of determination: "I will devote all my heart from the very first day of the official campaign."

Until June 2, the day before Election Day on June 3, the official campaign was allowed a total of thirteen days.

A campaign kickoff ceremony took place on the afternoon of the first day. That day, he posted a message that compressed the life he had lived into four sentences: "I've lived without taking even a single won. I've lived standing strong against the powerful and gentle to the weak. I've lived without telling lies. I've lived keeping my promises." Then he asked for a chance to keep his promises to the citizens of Buk-gu. For a candidate standing without a party name, all he could offer, in the end, was the track record of his life and his promises for the future.

The next day, a campaign vehicle toured the alleys. He noted in a short post on May 22 that an elementary school student had run over after seeing the campaign car. A few days later, he shared a story about two elementary school kids who asked permission to take a picture of him from a distance. Children don't have the right to vote. Yet, in the alleys, it was often the kids who recognized the candidate first and ran up to him. Five days later, he wrote, "I want to be someone who seems approachable to children."

The post left on his account on the night of May 22 was brief: "I'll work even harder tomorrow!"

The thirteen days of an independent candidate looked different from the thirteen days of a party candidate. A candidate with a party organization fills this period with the party's name and the party's people. Han Dong-hoon had neither. Yonhap News later reported that he made up for his organizational disadvantage with the support of volunteers and supporters. From day one, posts on his account read, "I greeted a volunteer who was working truly hard." Helping hands also came from outside the organization.

At the kickoff ceremony on the first day, the Pan-Civil Society Federation (Bum-Sa-Ryeon), a coalition spanning conservative and moderate civic groups, declared its endorsement. He

introduced the chairman of the federation as someone who originally disliked him and disagreed with his core ideas, yet had traveled all the way down to these alleys. On May 23, Kim Hyun-chul, chairman of the President Kim Young-sam Memorial Foundation and son of former President Kim Young-sam, declared his support at the campaign office, and Han Dong-hoon responded by promising to carry on the YS spirit in Busan Buk-gu.

What the party would have done was shared among the people, and the rest had to be filled by the candidate's own body and effort.

That fervor was evident even in the daily count of his social media posts. On slower days, twenty-four posts were uploaded to his account, and on busy days, as many as seventy-eight. May 25 saw seventy-five posts, and two days later, on May 27, it peaked at seventy-eight. Campaign announcements, photos taken in the alleys, names of neighborhoods and apartment complexes he had just passed through—the posts tracked the candidate's steps almost in real time. The slogan attached to every early post was "The Future of Buk-gu, Han Dong-hoon to the End."

Starting May 26, "Han Dong-hoon Everywhere in Buk-gu" and "Han Dong-hoon in Every Alley" were added. True to the slogans, he greeted voters near Deokcheon Station, Namsanjeong Station, and Gunam Station, and on Buddha's Birthday on May 24, he listened to citizens at Unsu-sa and Samgwang-sa temples. Words like "Just now," "Right now," and "An hour ago" frequently opened his posts. Just now in front of Lucky 3rd Apartment, right now near the Dangsoop shrine grove in Gupo 1-dong, two hours ago in front of the Mandeok 2-dong Administrative Welfare Center.

He wrote, "If you run over, I'll come right down to meet you," and responded to residents waving from windows, balconies, and rooftops with, "Thank you so much for waving from your window," and "Thank you for cheering from the balcony." In front of Mandeok Greencore Apartment, he posted that he was surprised by how many residents had come down, and he also shared a story about a citizen asking for an autograph from a moving car. Beginning May 27, the slogan "Rain or Shine, with Buk-gu to the End" also began appearing in his posts.

The tools of his campaign were also his own body and screens, rather than an organization. Announcing a 5:00 p.m. rally in front of Daiso on Deokcheon Youth Street, he shared that he would broadcast it live on his YouTube channel, posted a video asking for mutual follows on Instagram, and drove around doing greetings from a car at night. Evening greetings continued at Deokcheon Station and Gupo Bridge, and on some days, he headed out to the streets unannounced to meet citizens. The campaign route was drawn not by a party timetable, but by the candidate's own two feet.

On May 25 alone, when seventy-five posts were uploaded, his route completed a full loop around Buk-gu. He wrote that he stepped down from his campaign vehicle whenever citizens recognized him and approached. He got off at Deokcheon Rotary to meet citizens, toured the area around Gunam Station, passed by Daeseong Apartment near Gunam Market, Lucky Apartment, and the commercial building at the east gate of The East Apartment, and climbed all the way up near Hanshin Apartment at the very top of Mandeok 2-dong. At 5:00 p.m., a major rally was scheduled at Gupo Goryeodang Intersection.

A post noting that his wife had met with senior citizens at a senior center was also uploaded that day. And on that same day, a fire broke out in a commercial-residential neighborhood in Mandeok 3-dong. He wrote that he visited the scene only after the fire was contained so as not to interfere with firefighting efforts. Words expressing relief that there were no casualties, concern for nearby residents who must have been startled, and gratitude to firefighters working late into the night followed. The alleys he walked asking for votes and the alley where the fire broke out were one and the same.

The thirteen days were not just about handshakes and slogans. During the campaign period, he announced his Buk-gu campaign promises bundled into three main pillars. A city where people and money gather: promises to build a K-Complex Arena on the Nakdong River, cultivate the Nakdong River area into a Golden Belt harmonizing culture, commerce, and leisure, construct an Eco Skyway connecting Gupo Station and Nakdong River Eco Park, and extend the Geumbit Noeul Bridge pedestrian path to Gupo Market. A premium city where daily life is happy:

This included the Gupo Tunnel cutting through Baegyangan Mountain to connect Gupo and Choeup, a tidal flow lane system and auxiliary bridge for Gupo Bridge, increased KTX train services at Gupo Station, and putting the Gyeongbu Railway Line underground. A warm and even more reassuring city: welfare that follows life stages, from children to youth, families of people with disabilities, and seniors. He wrote that only when people and money gather will the economy revitalize, commercial districts revive, and jobs increase.

There were also days when news from outside the alleys silenced the campaign songs. On May 26, a collapse occurred during demolition work on the Seosomun Overpass in Seoul, resulting in casualties. He posted a message praying for the souls of the victims, offering condolences to the bereaved families, and wishing for a speedy recovery for the injured and the safety of the fire authorities. News reports followed that campaign songs were turned off at his rally sites.

On May 27, when seventy-eight posts were uploaded, an interview transcribed on his account included this Q&A: "I believe I don't have the freedom to lose; I only have the responsibility to win." The next day, a single line was posted: "Having a late dinner, then

heading out again to meet citizens." Dinner barely squeezed in between daytime campaigning and nighttime alleys. An independent candidate's day began once more just as others were clearing their dinner tables. For a person who believes he has no freedom to lose, there likely was no freedom to rest, either.

Early voting began on May 29. He cast his vote at the early voting station set up at the Mandeok 2-dong Administrative Welfare Center—the very building where he had submitted his move-in notification a month and a half earlier. It was also a day when campaign promises met the faces of the alleys. That day, he wrote that Gupo 3-dong was isolated like an island, promising to transform it completely with a tunnel connecting Gupo and Choeup.

He re-encountered an elderly mother who had pleaded with him a month earlier to build that tunnel. When she expressed her gratitude to him for making it a campaign promise, he said he felt even more grateful to her. On that day too, he wrote that he greeted voters while visiting every corner of Buk-gu, and sandwiched in between was a brief post: "I see the moon." It was likely the sky he looked up at while walking through the alleys. A post uploaded at 11:10 p.m. that same night began with the phrase "Buk-gu's Lost 20 Years."

He wrote that residents in a few neighborhoods without city gas said nothing had changed no matter how much they spoke to Lawmakers Jeon Jae-soo and Park Min-shik, promising that he would take care of it himself if elected. The criticism directed at the two lawmakers was his assertion. The city gas issue was a grievance he heard from residents in the alleys, and the "lost 20 years" was a phrase he brought up repeatedly throughout the campaign.

There were also clashes. During the campaign, claims alleging false residency registration were raised against him, to which he retorted, calling it "low-grade slander." The allegations and the rebuttals each became news headlines. Even while assertions collided, the alley greetings never stopped.

After campaigning at Deokcheon Youth Street on May 30, he wrote, "You cannot change the world with wind. You can change it only with votes." In his speech that day, he said it was his ironclad rule to fight politicians who oppose him, but never to fight citizens who oppose him. He also shared during the rally that a citizen who used to criticize him strongly told him that day, "Still, you work really hard, so I'm going to vote for you."

He also said that once the election is over, the wounds must be healed again, promising that he would be the one to heal them. That same day, at a commercial building in front of Gunam Station, he found it fascinating that middle school students were waiting outside because they heard he had arrived. A story about a sixth-grader who said, "My mom told me to take a picture if I met you," was also recorded that day. Behind the child's words were households discussing this election around their dinner tables. On the ballot, his name was

in the sixth, bottommost slot.

Number 6. He was a candidate who had to inform voters of the very location of his box first.

Even on the last day of May, he was at Gupo Market. Twenty-four posts were uploaded to his account that day, a noticeably small number compared to the eleven days he spent roaming the alleys. The account that had been shouting began to spare its words little by little. "You cannot change the world with wind. You can change the world only with votes." The words from the previous day's speech were posted once again that day.

And then the calendar turned to June. The time in the alleys that opened with greetings at the last train was heading toward its end. A child running over after seeing the campaign car, hands extending from windows and balconies, the night in the alley where a fire broke out, the story of city gas posted at 11:00 p.m.—all passed through that time. What moves the votes in these alleys? Is it the loudspeaker of the campaign car, the campaign promises in three directions, the hands clasped in the alleys, or the conversations at dinner tables? No one knew the answer in advance.

The answer would emerge two nights later, under the lights of the vote-counting station.

Chapter 6. 1,392 Votes at Dawn

June 2–June 4, 2026

"Please vote so that we can change the country." This single line was posted on Han Dong-hoon's Facebook page on election day, June 3, 2026. The time for campaign trucks and loudspeakers had ended the previous night, leaving the candidate with nothing left to do but plead. He posted forty-two updates throughout the day. Most were brief, few-line appeals. "Please make sure to vote right now. Wind alone cannot bring change. Voting can."

There was even a post with just hashtags attached to the seven letters reading, "Please vote." The same plea was repeated in the morning and afternoon, slightly changing shape each time. The tone was calm, but the frequency was not. That frequency likely spoke for the candidate's state of mind.

The post at 7:29 AM captured the previous night. "Final campaign rally yesterday night. I'll put my heart and soul into Gupo, Deokcheon, and Mandeok until the very end. Please make sure to vote. Wind alone cannot bring change; only voting can." Over fifty photos were uploaded with it. There was also a message directed at the volunteers: "Thank you to the volunteers who kept bowing at 120 degrees until midnight on the last day on streets where foot traffic was fading away."

This was on June 2, the final night allowed for campaigning. Bowing on a street where hardly anyone passes is a gesture that may or may not yield votes. Yet there were people who continued bowing until midnight, and for a candidate running without a party organization, these people were the force that replaced an organization.

He used the word wind several times. Words of support, applause for doing well, crowds gathering at rally sites—such things are the wind. Wind does not go into the ballot box. What goes in is just a single stamped piece of paper. That was why his election-day appeal was desperate. At 3:24 PM, he called out the neighborhood names one by one: "Citizens of Mandeok, Deokcheon, and Gupo. Please vote for Han Dong-hoon for a new future for Buk-gu."

On the same day, along with the phrase "worst kind of low-grade politics," he also wrote asking people to vote for him to block President Lee Jae-myung's runaway dismissal of indictments. Words addressing three local neighborhoods and words aiming at the entire nation sat side by side within a single account.

On this day, the entire country held local elections. Voters received multiple ballots to elect mayors, district heads, superintendents of education, and council members. For

voters in Busan Buk-gu Gap, there was one more ballot: a National Assembly by-election ballot. On that ballot, Han Dong-hoon's candidate number was 6. The reason his number was 6 despite there being only three candidates was that the earlier numbers were assigned first to parties holding parliamentary seats.

His posts carried the hashtags Candidate No. 6 and Independent Buk-gu Resident. Gupo, Deokcheon, and Mandeok—the neighborhoods he had walked through since spring—were all inside this constituency. It was an election to fill the seat vacated when the former representative ran for mayor of Busan, and the media picked this as a fierce battleground. There were three candidates: Ha Jung-woo of the Democratic Party of Korea, Park Min-shik of the People Power Party, and independent Han Dong-hoon. Unification of conservative candidates remained completely unachieved.

On January 29, he was expelled from the People Power Party. On April 14, he filed his address change at the Mandeok 2-dong Administrative Welfare Center. On May 15, he registered as an independent candidate. During the thirteen days of official campaigning, he posted dozens of updates a day while walking the alleys. From the winter of expulsion to the early summer of ballot counting, it was a little over four months. The final chapter of a contest waged without a party label was this night's vote count.

What this night decided was not just a single seat. It was also a night to determine whether politics could continue outside a party, and whether a single individual could overcome a political party's organization. As the ballot boxes closed, the time for pleading also came to an end. Now, no words could move a single vote. All that remained were the papers inside the ballot boxes and the broadcast screen showing the shifting numbers.

The counting began with the early voting ballot boxes. Since early voting is a system allowing votes to be cast ahead of election day, the ballots inside these boxes were feelings cast several days prior. Ha Jung-woo's name appeared at the top of the screen. The gap was over 10 percentage points. It was a double-digit deficit. In any ordinary vote count, these figures would be read as a decisive tilt in the race. Of course, numbers in the early stages of counting reflect only a fraction of the total. Anyone can make that calculation.

Still, the numbers right before one's eyes are what they are. His own words—that wind alone cannot bring change—were now testing him in reverse. Only he would know how it felt to watch that screen. He must have wavered. Yet he likely waited while holding on to thoughts of the main election day ballot boxes that had not yet been opened.

The vote count that began in the evening stretched through the night and into the early morning hours. As the counting progress rate rose, the uncounted votes dwindled. As remaining votes decreased, the tilt required to turn the tide grew steeper. For a candidate trailing behind, time inevitably flows with such cruelty. Yet the numbers on this night

moved in a different direction. The gap began to narrow. A double-digit lead dropped down to single digits.

As the night deepened, the counting percentage at the bottom of the screen climbed, and the battle unfolded between the top two names. The pace of closing the gap was slow. Past midnight, the date changed to June 4. The day of pleading was gone, and a new day of waiting for results had arrived. Still, his name remained below.

All that people outside the counting center could know were the numbers on the screen; each time a new set of numbers flashed, the gap shrank a little more, though the order remained unchanged. At the same hour, looking at the exact same numbers, people with opposing feelings must have coexisted within this constituency. For those waiting on the numbers, the night must have felt exceptionally long.

It was around 1:52 AM. The order of the two names flipped. The difference was 0.8 percentage points, or 578 votes. That was a difference of less than one person out of every hundred who voted. For the first time since the count began, Han Dong-hoon's name moved to the top. An article reporting the election victory described this moment as a "golden cross"—meaning the moment when the line of the trailing side crosses above that of the leading side. The transition from reversal to a definitive call did not take long.

Around 2:00 AM, the race was officially called. It was a determination that even if all remaining votes were counted, the order could no longer be overturned. Even after the call was made, the counting did not end. The vote count concludes only when the final box is opened.

After the date changed, his account remained silent throughout. On the account that had poured out so many pleas the previous day, no new post appeared during the dawn reversal or the moment the race was called. It was a time when there was no longer a mic to hold nor any reason to beg for votes. That silence might have been anxiety, or it might have been composure. Whichever it was, there was nothing he could do except watch the numbers on the screen.

The final tally was finalized as follows: Han Dong-hoon received 35,056 votes, or 42.96 percent. Ha Jung-woo received 33,664 votes, or 41.26 percent. Park Min-shik received 12,866 votes, or 15.76 percent. Adding all the votes received by the three candidates surpassed 80,000. The margin over Ha Jung-woo was 1,392 votes, or 1.70 percentage points. The gap that had been 578 votes at the moment of the reversal had widened to that extent by the time counting finished.

Considering the nighttime deficit, 1.70 percentage points was also the distance overcome and crossed over the course of the night. It was a night that began with a double-digit

deficit, passed through a single-digit chase, and concluded with a reversal at dawn.

After his victory was confirmed, Han Dong-hoon said, "I am grateful to the great citizens of Busan Buk-gu who backed me so that we can develop Busan Buk-gu through a historic victory and rebuild the conservatives. I will without fail carry out the duty entrusted to me, placing the citizens of Busan and the people of the Republic of Korea first." His gratitude was directed toward the citizens of Buk-gu, and his resolve toward fulfilling his duty. Befitting someone who had spoken of rebuilding conservatism throughout the election, his words of thanks also contained the word rebuilding.

For him, this victory seemed to be a Buk-gu affair while simultaneously being an affair beyond Buk-gu. Ha Jung-woo accepted the result: "I humbly accept the election results. I thank everyone who supported me with passion and dedication. I extend my congratulations to candidate Han on his election." It was a brief three sentences, with no words of resentment. The winner chose the phrase historic victory, while the loser chose the word humbly.

The numbers were quieter than the words of the two men. The votes supporting him stood at 42.96 percent. That was roughly forty-three out of every hundred voters. The remaining fifty-seven or so stamped their ballots next to other names. The statement that Buk-gu chose Han Dong-hoon was true, and the statement that over half of Buk-gu's votes did not choose him was also true. Both statements were true together on the same night. As Park Min-shik's vote total showed, conservative-leaning votes remained split in two until the very end.

Both the interpretation that he won despite being split and the interpretation that it was this razor-thin precisely because they were split seem valid. Assessments were also made that volunteers made up for the party organization's weakness. It was not a night whose explanation could be settled by any single reason. The winning votes and losing votes came from the exact same ballot boxes, and after counting ended, they returned to the morning of the very same neighborhood.

Still, one thing seems clear. 1,392 votes is not the number of a landslide victory. Nor is it a blank check handed to the winner to use as he pleases. It was support falling short of half, and a margin of less than two votes out of a hundred. It appears to be a number close to a mandate, attached to the condition of watching over him. It is a mandate to work also for the half that did not vote for him, and a mandate to actually deliver on the promises made in the alleys—the promise to make Buk-gu top priority.

No deadline was written on this mandate. Whether it was kept or broken would be confirmed throughout his term and in the next election.

At 4:17 PM on June 4, a new post appeared on his account: "Today, I am heading to the National Assembly in Seoul to attend the plenary session." The caption on the accompanying photo read 1:40 PM, the front entrance steps of the National Assembly main building. Less than twelve hours after the race was called for his victory, he stood on the steps of the National Assembly. This trip to the National Assembly was both the first and last news he shared that day.

Between the dawn in Mandeok and the afternoon in Yeouido, less than half a day had passed, and there seemed to be little time to savor the night of victory. The time to deliver answers to what those 1,392 votes commanded thus began on the very afternoon of his election victory.

Chapter 7. The Seat He Returned To

June 4–June 12, 2026

On Friday, June 5, 2026, independent lawmaker Han Dong-hoon entered the main building of the National Assembly for the first time as a member. Yonhap News and the Dong-A Ilbo reported on his arrival. The afternoon before, on June 4, a photo was posted to his Facebook page with the caption "1:40 p.m., the steps of the main building's front entrance," along with a single sentence: "Today I am heading to the National Assembly in Seoul to attend the plenary session."

On the very day the ballot count, decided by a mere 1,392 votes, wrapped up in the early hours of the morning, he was already standing before the National Assembly steps. The first destination he announced after his victory was confirmed wasn't the alleyways of Buk-gu, but the Assembly in Seoul. It must've been the stride of someone who hadn't slept a wink. Before receiving congratulations, the work had already begun.

Entering the Assembly marks the moment a lawmaker steps inside to start their official duties. There were no party colleagues walking alongside him down that path. That's what it means to be an independent. Instead, he posted a message of thanks to the residents of Buk-gu that day. "I will keep visiting you to express my gratitude. I came to Seoul today for my first day at the Assembly, and I'm heading back to Buk-gu tomorrow." The outline of his new routine fit entirely within those two sentences. Working as a legislator in Seoul, then returning to Busan's Buk-gu to greet the residents, his days would now stretch across two cities.

The National Assembly wasn't an unfamiliar building to him. During his tenure as Minister of Justice, he went back and forth as a cabinet member responding to lawmakers' questions; as leader of the ruling party, he walked its halls at the helm of his party. But this was his first time entering as a member of parliament. The man who once answered questions was now the one asking them and casting votes. The Assembly he joined after winning the by-election was also one where other lawmakers had already served nearly half their terms.

And on January 29, 2026, the People Power Party expelled the man who had once been their leader. A little over four months later, he returned to the same building without the party's name, standing solely as an individual lawmaker. The building remained unchanged, but his status was entirely different.

Inside the main building were the members of the party that had expelled him. These were the people he would vote with in the same chamber and cross paths with in the same hallways. Walking back in among them couldn't have felt lighthearted. While the expulsion wasn't something he had asked for, this return was something he had forged with votes. Gladness and awkwardness, pride and loneliness must've blurred together with every step.

He might've once envisioned a return in which he completed the reinstatement process and walked back in proudly under the party's banner. The actual return looked lonelier than that. He entered not through a door opened by the party, but through a door opened by voters. Wherever he sat in the plenary hall, that seat was built not by the party, but by Buk-gu. Still, his message to the residents of Buk-gu remained calm and plain. A word of thanks, and a promise to return, that was all.

Fixing his sights not on yesterday's Yeouido, but on tomorrow's Buk-gu, that must've been the mindset he chose.

That same day, a photo of a different tone appeared on his Facebook page. "Bukgu Gom watching the Channel A interview." It showed the bear mascot, Bukgu Gom, watching his broadcast interview. Even after the election victory, this mascot hadn't retired. The steps of the Assembly's main building and a mascot bear sat side by side on the same account that day; alongside the tension of Seoul stood the humor of Buk-gu.

Saturday, June 6, was the 71st Memorial Day, a day honoring those who gave their lives for the country. True to his word, he traveled down to Busan and wrote that he had paid tribute at the UN Memorial Cemetery to the heroes who defended the Nakdong River front line. In his Memorial Day post, he wrote: "A nation's dignity begins with remembering every single one of them without exception." It was a post emphasizing that those who sacrificed their lives for the nation shouldn't be remembered selectively based on partisan lines or political gains.

He added that blind spots in honoring veterans still remained, promising never to neglect anything that could be resolved through legislation. The post included a commitment tied to his new office number: "The door to Room 1022 in the Members' Office Building will always be open to persons of national merit and their families." The promise he offered on his first Memorial Day as a lawmaker was simply to keep the door open.

In the early hours of Sunday morning, he wrote that he greeted hikers to thank them for his election victory. The greetings started before sunrise. He visited the Sinmandok Soccer Club and badminton clubs at Hwamyeong Eco Park, and greeted Busan residents at a community gathering commemorating the 56th anniversary of the Saemaul Undong. It was a packed schedule spanning multiple stops in a single day.

On Monday, he visited the Gupo Livestock Wholesale Market and wrote, "They welcomed me so warmly," before standing at the Gupo Bridge Intersection and the Namsanjeong Station Intersection. At the Deokcheon Rotary, he mentioned that a volunteer was still continuing to offer thank-you greetings, so he joined in greeting passersby together. On Tuesday, he performed a deep bow to the elderly at the Buk-gu branch of the Senior Citizens Association of Korea and visited the Buk-gu Veterans Hall over two consecutive days. He also stood at the Green Core Intersection, and on Wednesday offered greetings at the Sinmandok Nonghyup Intersection.

Messages of thanks appeared on his Facebook page multiple times a day. The route wasn't much different from the paths he had walked during the election campaign. Only now, these weren't steps taken to ask for votes, but steps taken to thank people for them.

During that same week, posts with a completely different tone appeared alternately on the exact same Facebook page. He wrote that President Lee Jae-myung had made it clear at a press conference that he wanted the indictment in his own case withdrawn. Withdrawing an indictment is the procedure by which prosecutors drop charges and halt a trial. Han declared that if such a thing happened, he would move toward impeachment, taking the lead alongside the public. "If martial law warrants impeachment, so does withdrawing an indictment."

Just days after his election victory, his tone had returned to the way it was when he directly confronted the administration. Words of gratitude at intersections and warnings directed at the president crossed the same screen only hours apart. The same hand had written both posts. It was a contrast hard to believe coming from a single person's account.

On Thursday, June 11, he paid a visit to the senior members of the Constitutional Government Association. The association is a gathering of former members of the National Assembly. A lawmaker who had just returned to the Assembly listened to the wisdom of seniors who had walked those halls long ago. He wrote: "I will take the words of our senior members of the Constitutional Government Association to heart and surely deliver good politics and the reconstruction of the conservative movement."

The title of a video posted by KNN, a local Busan broadcaster, contained a caption saying he couldn't hide a smile as praise poured in from the elders. Both 'praise' and 'smile' were words chosen by the broadcaster, not by him.

Interviews followed one after another. He reposted the full Korean translation of a Yomiuri Shimbun article dated June 11 to his Facebook page. The Japanese newspaper referred to Oh Se-hoon in Seoul and Han Dong-hoon in Busan together as "the two Hons," writing that conservatism, which had been on the brink of collapse, had gained a foothold for rebuilding. It was he himself who reposted the article. He likely wanted to show how

outside observers interpreted his victory.

The piece also included a recollection of how a candidacy initially judged reckless was turned around through a grassroots campaign reliant on fundraising and volunteers. The article noted that during the January 29 press conference when his expulsion was decided, he left behind the words, "I will definitely return." Just as he promised, he returned. The remaining question, however, was where he had returned to. He had returned to the Assembly, but not yet to the party.

The title of a Chosun Ilbo interview he shared that same day contained both that question and its answer side by side: "Rejoining the PPP? I will set my watch to the public mood." The question of whether he would return to the party that expelled him must've followed him wherever he went. He didn't rush his answer, pushing it behind the phrase 'the clock of public sentiment.' It was an answer that was neither a refusal nor an acceptance. It seemed to imply that the one holding the hands of the clock was the voters, not himself.

On that same June 11, yet another post of a completely different nature appeared on Facebook, revealing that he was under a travel ban. A travel ban is a measure preventing someone from leaving the country due to investigations or other legal reasons. He wrote: "The Democratic Party's political special counsel banned me from overseas travel based solely on a single false accusation complaint from a pro-Democratic Party group without any foundation, and then extended the travel ban without doing a single thing. Tomorrow, June 12, is the expiration date of that extended travel ban."

He stated it could only be seen as an attempt to tarnish him in the Busan Buk-gu Gap election, adding that no one had even contacted him during that time. "Let's see if they extend it again. Whether they extend it or not, it's a comedy." According to his claims, the travel ban began during the campaign period and continued past his victory. It meant that while he was out seeking votes, and even after receiving them, he was someone unable to leave the country. All of this was his claim as presented in his post.

The special counsel's explanation regarding the reasons for the travel ban wasn't included in that post.

The next morning, June 12, the title of a Yonhap News TV talk show segment he shared called him a lawmaker who survived the battleground, and at the end of that title, the word 'reinstatement' was attached as well. In this segment, he wrote that he discussed President Lee Jae-myung and Chairman Jung Chung-rae regarding the withdrawal of indictments. In the afternoon, a post went up stating that the special counsel had extended the travel ban once again. "The Lee Jae-myung administration's political special counsel is engaging in a 'childish battle of nerves.'" He also posed a question.

"What reason is there for Han Dong-hoon to be banned from traveling abroad three times?" And he wrote: "Did you place a travel ban to make Han Dong-hoon lose the election, and now you're ashamed to drop it just because the election is over?" Only a single day separated the lavish praise of the elders from the notification of the special counsel's extension. The morning of election victory and the shadow of investigation coexisted in the exact same week.

On that same day, he didn't forget to post a message directed at Buk-gu. "Thank you to the citizens of Mandeok, Gupo, and Deokcheon in Buk-gu. I will work hard." Mandeok, Gupo, and Deokcheon are the names of the neighborhoods he had walked through for over two months. Questions directed at the special counsel and words of gratitude for the residents passed through the same account within a span of a few hours. As if determined never to skip greetings no matter how the battle in the Assembly escalated, posts of gratitude unfailingly anchored the beginning and end of that week. Between those two posts lay a day in the life of an independent lawmaker.

Where does an independent lawmaker belong in the returned National Assembly? He had no party conference room, nor the fence of a party line. All he had was a body shuttling between Seoul and Busan, and the Buk-gu ballots that sent that body to the Assembly. Days requiring him to weigh the significance of every single piece of paper were waiting for him in the week following his arrival.

Chapter 8. The Weight of a Single Ballot

June 13–June 22, 2026

"Here's my new business card." Thus begins a post uploaded to Han Dong-hoon's Facebook page on June 18, 2026. "I included Gupo, Deokcheon, and Mandeok so I could speak of and introduce them even one more time wherever I go. I will do my utmost." A business card is a single piece of paper handed to someone met for the first time. Even with just a name, title, and contact information, it serves its purpose. On that narrow slip of paper, the first-term lawmaker inscribed the names of three neighborhoods.

Whether in a conference room in Seoul or a hallway in the National Assembly, the idea was to ensure that anyone who received his card would read and hear the names Gupo, Deokcheon, and Mandeok at least once. Neighborhood names that would have been unfamiliar to him just three months ago had now become the names that slipped out first from his fingertips. A National Assembly member's business card travels far. It reaches a cabinet minister's desk, sits beside a reporter's notebook, and finds its way into the pocket of a newly met public official.

With each of those hands, the three neighborhoods of Busan's Buk-gu were handed over together. Even after his election, the phrase "Buk-gu's Future, All the Way Han Dong-hoon" continued to accompany his posts. The business card was the tangible object that put that pledge onto paper.

On Saturday, June 13, five days before the business card post was uploaded, he was in Busan. On that single day alone, ten posts accumulated on his account. At dawn, he shared an article about a broadcast interview he had done. It was titled "Listening to 'Powerful 0.5-Term' Lawmaker Han Dong-hoon." Lawmakers elected in by-elections who serve half of a four-year term are called "0.5-termers," and the modifier "powerful" had been attached to that description. As day broke, his day in Busan began.

"The promise to mow the grass at the City Development Corporation apartments is underway." It was a report of five Korean words confirming that a campaign promise made to residents was moving forward after the election. Posts followed mentioning that he and his wife served noodles at the Deokcheon Welfare Center, pounded rice cake with a mallet at Buk-gu's Dano event, greeted citizens from a hiking club, and met citizens from Unsu Temple leaving on a dawn temple pilgrimage. At night, as soon as he stepped off the plane, he headed to the night market at Hwamyeong Eco Park.

He wrote that it was wonderfully cool and nice being by the Nakdong River. On this day, there was one more promise to keep. It was the wedding day of a young volunteer night patrol member with whom he had walked patrol the day after moving into Mandeok 2-dong. He wrote that he had promised to attend back then, that today was that day, and that he wished the couple happiness. A promise made two months ago in an alley was thus kept.

The posts continued through Sunday and Monday. Brief updates went up one after another: offering victory greetings via video calls, leaving notes asking for mutual follows, and meeting citizens at the Busan Buk-gu Youth Employment Hope Concert and a gateball tournament. Around this time, the phrase "conservative reconstruction" repeatedly appeared in his posts. On June 15, a post was published sharing words from Yu In-hak and Lim Bok-jin, whom he referred to as seniors, followed by the words of Park Sang-hee and Kang Soo-rim.

These were days when his body moved through event venues in Buk-gu while his words were aimed at the entire conservative camp.

On Wednesday, June 17, he shared that he had attended a National Assembly forum hosted by three lawmakers: Bae June-young, Kim Gunn, and Kim Ye-ji. For a lawmaker without a party affiliation, daily routines at the National Assembly are shaped by such invitations and attendance. For someone with no party meetings to attend, each forum held by fellow lawmakers served as a channel to meet people to work with. That same day, a short message of congratulations was posted on his account: "Congratulations to our Gupo Market!" These were days when a forum hall in Seoul and a market in Busan appeared side by side on a single account just hours apart.

On Thursday, June 18, the day he introduced his business card, two posts carrying different weight were published on the same account. The 7:47 AM post began: "'Abolishing early voting and extending main election voting is my longstanding view.'" An article from a year earlier, March 2025, was attached to it.

The content noted that while serving as Minister of Justice, he expressed the opinion that manual counting was essential; while serving as Emergency Response Committee Chairman and Party Leader, he urged that election managers hand-stamp early voting ballots directly; and he publicly advocated for extending main voting days instead of keeping early voting. Because early voting allows people to cast ballots ahead of the designated election day, hearing only the argument to eliminate it might make it sound like a proposal to reduce convenience.

That is why his argument is always paired with extending the main voting period. Preserving the opportunity to vote while ensuring the administration is done in a

trustworthy manner had long been his answer. In that article, his words contained an ametaphor: "Mold easily grows in shadows untouched by sunlight." The curtains had to be pulled open so that no corner of the National Election Commission remained untouched by sunlight.

The 11:45 AM post began by relaying an announcement made the previous day: "Yesterday's announcement by Cho Hyun-wook, Chairman of the Fact-Finding Committee, confirmed that Standing Commissioner Wi Cheol-hwan of the National Election Commission was briefed on the reduction of ballot printing—one of the main causes of this infringement on voting rights." He then conveyed the committee's announcement that despite the briefing, the matter was handled solely under the authority of the Secretary General without being reported to the NEC Chairperson. His demand was clear.

According to his post, Standing Commissioner Wi Cheol-hwan was serving as acting NEC Chairperson at the time, and immediate responsibility for this incident had to be placed on him, while opposition parties ought to initiate impeachment proceedings. He wrote that a precedent must be established showing that an NEC official who treats the public's voting rights lightly can be impeached. He also attached a warning that he, along with the public, would watch to see if the Democratic Party would agree to this impeachment motion.

There was also a sentence warning that if the opposition merely claimed in words that suffrage was not a partisan issue while shielding him simply because he was a standing commissioner appointed by President Lee Jae-myung and a classmate from the Judicial Research and Training Institute, they would not escape public condemnation. To someone who entered the National Assembly by a margin of 1,392 votes, what a single ballot meant was not a matter of calculation, but of lived reality. The feelings of the people whose hands he had held in the alleys from spring to summer had been carried on those thin slips of paper all the way to the National Assembly.

Over the weekend, neighborhood greetings and systemic discussions flowed side by side. On Friday, June 19, he offered greetings at the June 25 Patriotic Prayer Service held at Deokcheon First Church and walked through Gupo Market once more. He shared his longstanding view that today's world bears many similarities to the period just before World War I, and recommended a book that treated the subject in an accessible, light manner. On Sunday, he visited a senior center in Mandeok, and a brief post conveyed the atmosphere of those days.

"I came back after the election, and you're feeding me again." There were residents who served meals even after the election was over, and there was a politician who kept visiting even after the election was over. Posts announcing the neighborhood's morning, such as "Saturday morning at a Deokcheon cafe," were also invariably mixed in. That same weekend,

he shared a video produced by local broadcaster KNN without adding any comments. The video was titled with a caption mentioning that as allegations surrounding the NEC came to light, Han Dong-hoon's remarks from a year ago were re-emerging.

During his time as a candidate, he was someone who criticized the system. Writing posts, giving interviews, and calling for the curtains to be opened were the extent of what he could do back then. Words gain strength only when there are listeners, and qualifications come only when votes are won. The voters of Buk-gu granted him that qualification on June 3. A National Assembly member is different. A lawmaker is someone who can introduce bills, someone whose profession is transforming words into statutory provisions.

On Monday, June 22, he introduced his first bill as a lawmaker. It was an amendment to the Board of Audit and Inspection Act, aimed at placing the National Election Commission under the scope of the Board of Audit and Inspection's performance audits. The Korea Economic Daily and Financial News reported on this sponsorship. The topics a National Assembly member can address are endless: the economy, education, welfare, national defense. Out of all those topics, the first one he chose was elections.

He made the very procedure that brought him to the National Assembly—the process by which ballots are printed, managed, and counted—his very first task. The Board of Audit and Inspection is an agency that inspects whether state institutions perform their duties properly, and a performance audit is an inspection examining how public officials within those institutions handle their work. Placing the election management body under that same scrutiny meant his longstanding call to open the curtains was beginning to take the shape of legal articles.

However, a substantial argument stood on the opposing side. The National Election Commission is an independent body established directly by the Constitution, and there was concern that if the election management body were subjected to audits by another state institution, its independence could be undermined. His first bill stepped right into the middle of those two opposing arguments. A bill cannot be introduced alone.

Because the National Assembly Act stipulates that a bill requires the names of ten or more lawmakers to be sponsored, a lawmaker without a party must seek those signatures outside a party structure. Sponsorship is also merely the beginning. For a proposal to become law, committee review and a plenary vote remain, and the amendment bill of June 22 was a document that had just been submitted.

Even on the Monday he introduced the bill, posts about Busan were published side by side on his account. There were posts about meeting citizens at the One Asia Festival Park Concert held in Hwamyeong Eco Park, attending the 2026 Busan Buk-gu Badminton Division League, and offering greetings at a charity pub hosted by the Gupo 2-dong Youth

Association. There was also a post mentioning that he had met again with the "shoebrother" he used to see every day at Deokcheon Rotary. The short posts during these tendays almost all ended with the same phrase:

"I will do my utmost." The sign-off he used as a candidate remained unchanged after he became a lawmaker. A brief two-phrase post reading, "Cheers. I will do my utmost," was also nestled in between. It was a day when a bill to reform the election system was submitted in Seoul, while greetings continued on badminton courts and in eco parks in Busan.

A business card and a bill are both paper. A business card completes its job once handed over, but introducing a bill is just the beginning of the work. For a bill introduced without a party's backing to cross the committee threshold and survive through a plenary vote, it must win the hearts of other lawmakers—and each of those lawmakers was ultimately chosen on a ballot. A longstanding view, he wrote. That longstanding view had now received a National Assembly filing number.

What a business card makes known is a name; what a bill seeks to change is a rule. A name becomes known if spoken ten times, but a rule changes only by winning a vote. What more is needed for words to become law? Before this question could even settle, the next question—one that had to be examined in the language of the law—was approaching from a factory outside the National Assembly.

Chapter 9. Factories and Questions of Law

June 23–June 26, 2026

On Friday, June 26, 2026, a long post appeared on Han Dong-hoon's Facebook page. It was a Friday three weeks after he had taken office as an independent lawmaker. He re-posted a piece he had uploaded the previous evening just a day later. The title itself was a question: "If the president pressures top executives to make a decision, should they just say 'yes' and follow along?" Following the question was a warning.

It was a warning that unless directors opposed it, they would face legal liability for violating their duty of loyalty under the amended Commercial Code. The post revolved around where the semiconductor second cluster—the massive factory complex to be built by Samsung Electronics and SK Hynix—should be located.

He wrote that the Lee Jae-myung administration was calling in the heads of Samsung and SK, pressuring them to build the semiconductor cluster in the Honam region. He added that if the executives caved to the pressure and accepted, the government would announce that the investment was decided independently by the companies. He then brought up the Mir Foundation and K-Sports Foundation cases from the Park Geun-hye administration. He asked how this was any different from when companies claimed back then that they were giving donations 'voluntarily.'

That scandal had helped bring down the Park Geun-hye government. Referring to the current pressure, he also used the phrase 'anachronistic tactics out of the eighties.' The post contained no details on what had actually been said between the government and the corporate leaders, nor did it include any explanation from the government's side. It was entirely a picture he had painted.

The weight of the post rested on legal clauses. Companies have people called directors. They are the ones who gather on the board to decide important corporate matters entrusted to them by shareholders. The Commercial Code imposes a duty of loyalty on these directors—an obligation to work not for their own interest, but for the company's interest. The amended Commercial Code added shareholders to the scope of that obligation. It meant that directors must be loyal to both the company and its shareholders.

Han Dong-hoon turned this legal provision against the government. He wrote that making a decision harmful to shareholders under political pressure was a direct breach of the duty of loyalty, and that directors would bear legal responsibility for it. He noted that Samsung Electronics and SK Hynix were companies in which 5 million domestic retail investors held

stock, and that the National Pension Service alone held 260 trillion won worth of shares in the two companies as of last month. He left a request directed at the boards of directors of both companies.

He urged them to oppose the coercion, stating that directors have a duty and responsibility to make decisions for the majority of shareholders and the future of the enterprise. He also wrote that if retaliation from the administration followed, he would step up to protect them. "Oppose it resolutely."

He wrote that it was the Lee Jae-myung administration itself that had pushed through the Commercial Code amendment claiming to protect retail investors. He turned the very clause created by that administration back into a yardstick to measure it. A man who had been a prosecutor, Minister of Justice, and party leader was now facing politics as a first-term lawmaker without a party or an organization. The weapon left in his hands was the language of the law. Translating what happens between power and business into words like duty, responsibility, and illegality was likely a habit ingrained deep inside him.

The semiconductor story had been building since two days prior. In his first post uploaded on the afternoon of Wednesday, June 24, he referred to the battle surrounding the Democratic Party convention as the 'Myeong-Cheong War' and wrote that deciding the location of a semiconductor factory should not be used as 'bullets' in that fight. The grounds he put forward were that the administration was treating the move of the second cluster to Honam as a done deal, and claiming that the Yongin cluster was already saturated even before its completion.

He cited SK Hynix's 2019 investment and Samsung Electronics' 2023 investment in Yongin as examples. His point was that corporate judgment came first, and the government assisted that judgment—that this was how today's semiconductor powerhouse was built. He added that since the success or failure of semiconductor investments is determined only ten or twenty years down the road, if a government with a five-year term interferes in location decisions out of political calculation, the cost and risk will be borne by businesses, citizens, and future generations.

His consistent argument was that semiconductors are an industry tied to the nation's future and should not be treated with political logic. He posted the same message three times over three days. He seems to have felt it was not something to state just once and let pass.

For a single factory to be built, many things must follow. An uninterrupted power supply must reach it, water to run the plant must be accessible, and workers as well as parts suppliers must gather nearby. When a factory comes, jobs arrive, and young people who left return. That is why any city eagerly awaits a major factory.

In a country where people and money concentrate in the capital region, that waiting is desperate, and the logic of balanced regional development—that the government should step in to draw an even industrial map—stands upon that desperation. Han Dong-hoon also wrote that he agreed balanced development was an important policy goal. What he questioned was the order of events: should companies weigh options first and the government assist, or should the government decide first and companies follow?

The answer he offered was that instead of tearing away top-tier industries from other regions, we should foster industries in which a given region can excel. As a lawmaker representing Busan, he could not have been unaware of how regional communities felt while waiting for factories. Yet, he wrote that corporate judgment must come first.

Semiconductors were not the only topic he debated that week. On Tuesday, June 23, he shared that he had attended an event on a national and public university integration model hosted by Representative Kim Hyeong-dong, as well as an event on security and veterans' affairs hosted by Representative Han Ki-ho. A post was also uploaded that day mentioning that he had visited Ilshim Dongwoohoi, a gathering of Busan private taxi drivers, to pay his respects. It came with the comment that he had promised to return after the election.

A freshman lawmaker's weekdays spanned both the event halls of the National Assembly and the alleyways of Busan. On the same day, a lengthy rebuttal was also posted to Facebook. It was a reply to a broadcast interview by Representative Song Young-gil, who had singled him out.

Wartime operational control (OPCON) is the authority to command military operations in the event of war. Currently, this authority resides with the Combined Forces Command formed jointly by South Korea and the United States, and transferring it to South Korean forces is called the OPCON transfer. It has long been a contested issue between those who favor a hasty transfer and those who believe preparation comes first. He addressed the examples cited by Representative Song in his interview one by one.

He suggested considering how the Afghan government, which held its own OPCON, fell. He noted that operations like responding to pirates in the Gulf of Aden differed fundamentally in scale and nature from an all-out war against a nuclear-armed adversary, and wrote that an example from Vietnam 60 years ago could not simply be applied to the Korean Peninsula today. He wrote that he was not opposed to regaining OPCON in the long term; what he took issue with was the hasty timing and method of the transfer.

The post concluded with this sentence: "The national interest takes precedence over the bravado and fantasies of the self-reliance faction."

Another post went up at 3:52 a.m. on June 24. It was the story of the late Lee Dae-jun, a public official killed by North Korean forces in the West Sea. Han wrote that he was appalled to see Democratic Party lawmakers blustering about fabricated indictments instead of apologizing to the bereaved family. He also claimed that pressure from the Lee Jae-myung administration had blocked the truth of the incident from coming to light, driving the prosecution to abandon its appeal.

It was a story the opposing side would tell differently, and this, too, was his own argument contained in his writing. The post was uploaded once more the following day. Days of writing long posts past three in the morning were continuing. Whether it was anger or impatience, something was keeping sleep at bay.

On Thursday, June 25, he shared news of an interview with Japan's Asahi Shimbun. The Asahi was a newspaper that had traveled directly to the campaign sites in Buk-gu during the election to cover and report on him. He wrote that he gladly accepted when they requested an interview again after the election. A newspaper from a neighboring country had remembered the independent candidate who once walked the alleys of Busan's Buk-gu and returned to seek him out.

A battle fought without a party banner seemed to be making news beyond the country's borders as well. It also took place about two weeks after he disclosed himself that the special prosecutor had placed a travel ban on him. That week, he also posted that he had eaten lunch with the custodial staff and supervisors on the 10th floor of the National Assembly Members' Office Building, listening to their concerns. Posts talking about the president and corporate tycoons sat side by side with the story of lunch shared with cleaning staff on the same account.

And then Friday arrived. On June 26, his steps were in the alleys of Buk-gu. On his way to a senior center, he bumped into children from Gunam Elementary School, and the post included the phrase "Ttalkong-inam met again." He offered greetings at the 26th anniversary ceremony of the Saemaul Library held at the Deokcheon 1-dong Community Service Center, greeted seniors heading out on an outing from the Silverbell Welfare Center, and met citizens at an event to restore Mandeokcheon Stream. A short video titled 'It's Han Dong-hoon' was also uploaded.

"I will do my utmost." These words were written repeatedly in his posts that day. It was a day of arguing against Seoul with legal clauses and numbers, while greeting children and seniors in Buk-gu.

In the evening, a short, sharp post went up. Claiming that the presidential chief of staff for policy had gone first to broadcaster Kim Ou-joon to report on Samsung and SK's investment issues, he asked: "Is Kim Ou-joon a major shareholder of Samsung and SK?" At 10:55 p.m.,

the screen was once again filled with numbers about semiconductors. He directed a question at President Lee Jae-myung, asking whether it was truly true that semiconductors were being relocated because Gwangju and Jeonnam had sufficient power and industrial water.

He wrote that solar power is generated only when the sun shines, whereas cutting-edge semiconductor factories cannot afford a power fluctuation of even a hundredth of a second, and that while running the cluster requires roughly 430,000 tons of industrial water a day, the Yeongsan River basin tasked with supplying that water is facing shortages even now. He questioned why they insisted solely on renewable energy in Honam, noting that stable nuclear power was also available in the Busan-Ulsan-Gyeongnam area and Gangwon Province.

It was a post dense with numbers and units, but those numbers were also evidence he had selected. At the end of the post, he wrote that we must prevent slicing open the belly of the goose that lays the golden eggs. Greetings on the way to the senior center and midnight calculations of industrial water sat side by side under the same date.

Deciding where a single factory should stand involves power, water, people's livelihoods, and time ten or twenty years down the line. Who should make that decision? The president? Corporate tycoons? The board of directors? The 5 million shareholders? Han Dong-hoon put forward his own answer citing provisions of the Commercial Code, but the question itself—who should determine the location of a factory—remained right outside the text of those provisions. The last weekend of June was approaching.

Chapter 10. Uniforms and Electricity Rates

June 27 – July 3, 2026

On Sunday, June 28, shortly past five in the afternoon, a post went up on Han Dong-hoon's Facebook page. "Today marks the 24th anniversary of the victory in the Second Battle of Yeonpyeong." It began with those words. He wrote that on the morning of June 29, 2002, while the entire nation was swept up in World Cup cheers, the service members aboard Chamsuri 357 defended the Northern Limit Line in the West Sea to the end. Then he called out the names of six men, one by one, along with their ranks.

Major Yoon Young-ha, Master Sergeant Han Sang-gook, Master Sergeant Jo Cheon-hyeong, Petty Officer First Class Hwang Do-hyeon, Petty Officer First Class Seo Hoo-won, and Petty Officer Second Class Park Dong-hyeok. Before each of the six names stood the prefix marking the deceased. Six men never returned from that sea.

The Second Battle of Yeonpyeong was a naval clash between North and South Korea fought off the coast of Yeonpyeong Island in the West Sea on June 29, 2002. The Northern Limit Line is the maritime border drawn between North and South in the West Sea. Near this line, there had been both major and minor skirmishes before. That morning, a North Korean patrol boat crossed the line in a surprise attack, and a small patrol craft named Chamsuri 357 fought back. The sea was held, but six service members lost their lives.

Ahead of the national team's World Cup third-place match that evening, the streets were filled with red shirts and roaring cheers; celebration and gunfire shared the same day. Because the cheers were so loud, people long said that the sea of that morning was pushed to the back of the country's memory for a time. Twenty-four years later, on a Sunday, a first-term lawmaker called out those six names once more. He referred to the day as an anniversary of victory.

His intent was likely to remember it not as a battle lost, but as a defense held.

The post continued with a message on memory and respect. "A nation's dignity depends on how it remembers and honors those who showed courage and devotion." He also wrote that giving people faith that the state stays with them to the end is the starting point of veterans' care. Veterans' care means the nation looking after those who were injured or passed away while fighting for their country, as well as their families. Those in uniform stand in harm's way at the nation's call.

Only when there is a promise that the nation will stand with them to the end does that call become honorable, and veterans' care is the keeping of that promise. He concluded by

writing that the sacrifices of the six men couldn't be repaid merely by the passage of time, promising to see through the work of reducing blind spots in support and fixing treatment to fit reality. It read as a promise not to measure today's pain by standards set long ago. Blind spot refers to the shadows that institutional systems fail to reach.

There are people standing in those shadows who need help but fall outside eligibility rules. Twenty-four years is more than enough time for a baby born on that day to grow into an adult. Throughout all those years, surviving family members and comrades must have spent the end of every June with that sea in their minds.

Early that same morning, another post went up announcing an interview with Sisa Journal. "The wounds of those who devoted themselves to the nation aren't only the visible ones," he said in the interview. Physical scars are visible. But emotional wounds—where battlefield memories resurface in the middle of the night decades later—don't show on the surface. Doctors call such a condition post-traumatic stress disorder.

The word trauma also refers to the scars left on the mind by a severe shock. He noted that countries like the United States and the United Kingdom view veterans' trauma and mental health issues as the responsibility of the state rather than the individual, arguing that Korea too must expand the scope of veterans' care from bodily compensation to emotional recovery. Just as physical wounds receive compensation and surgery, mental wounds deserve equal care.

His proposal was to expand the mental healing centers at veterans' hospitals and connect them with designated local partner hospitals and community mental health facilities, building a system where anyone can receive psychological counseling, treatment, and family support regardless of where they live. Since veterans' hospitals exist in only a few major cities, people living farther away rely on state-designated local partner hospitals. Because healing the mind doesn't end with one or two visits but requires long-term care, doors to counseling and treatment must be accessible near where people live.

He extended that circle of care to include family members who grow exhausted while standing by their injured loved ones. On that single day, pledges for a memorial day and plans for clinic rooms sat side by side on one account.

Three days later, at 1:50 a.m. on July 1, he posted about an incident at a baseball stadium. At a high school baseball game, the May 18 Gwangju Democratization Movement had been used to jeer at an opposing team, resulting in a six-month suspension for the young players. A suspension is a penalty barring a player from competing for a set period. His post was short and direct. The jeering was "wrong."

However, "imposing a six-month suspension on young students is excessive." And he set one sentence apart: "They are young students."

The May 18 Gwangju Democratization Movement refers to May 1980, when citizens of Gwangju demanded democracy against a military regime and many lost their lives to the weapons of martial law troops. Forty-six years later, it remains an unhealed wound. Turning another person's great sorrow into a cheer-section mock injures those living with that pain all over again. Mockery of that wound had mostly come from the political extremes, and whenever such remarks surfaced, conservative parties faced harsh backlash.

Voices calling out wrong as wrong were often late or quiet. Yet a conservative politician elected in Busan firmly labeled it wrong in a post published before dawn without hesitation. There were no Gwangju votes at stake, nor was there any guarantee his base would welcome the words. He appeared to place the judgment of right and wrong ahead of partisan cues. At the same time, he weighed the severity of the punishment.

His sequence was to establish the judgment of wrong first, and only then talk about the punishment. For a high school athlete, six months is a penalty that can erase an entire season. He wrote asking why an adult broadcaster who said on air that people should be flattened with tanks merely apologized and kept broadcasting. He was challenging a scale that grew dull before adults' misdeeds yet harsh only in front of children's mistakes.

His point was to distinguish wrong for what it was, but to measure punishment with regard for age and circumstances. Because it didn't take sides exclusively with those grieving the wound of May 18 or those worrying about the young players, it was a post that could leave both sides feeling let down. Yet he wrote down both judgments anyway.

The following day, July 2, a short three-sentence post went up. "If the 77 Act is passed, politicians like me will be the beneficiaries. But I firmly oppose it. Because it's a matter of the Constitution and common sense." Around that time, talk was circulating in political circles about passing what was called the 77 Act. He didn't elaborate in the post on what the law would alter or how. What the post made clear was plain.

Should the law come into being, politicians like him would benefit, yet he opposed it anyway. The word firmly cut off his own retreat in advance. In trials, it's a long-standing principle that judges do not preside over cases in which they have a personal interest, because anyone loses perspective when it comes to their own affairs. In politics, no such principle applies, leaving members of the National Assembly to constantly handle laws that directly help or harm them.

That's why a sentence declaring oneself a beneficiary before stating opposition stands out. The Constitution is the nation's primary covenant, and common sense represents the

eye level of ordinary people. He chose those two over self-interest as his grounds for opposition. Of course, one could interpret loudly voicing opposition as its own calculated move to build reputation. There's no looking into inner motives. Yet when putting the words he chose across this single week side by side, a consistent thread emerges.

The man who attended to the invisible wounds of those in uniform and drew a line first on the Gwangju issue that offered no partisan advantage was now pushing away a law that would benefit himself. It reflected a stance seeking to set standards of judgment outside immediate gains and losses. Calculation wasn't entirely absent, but the hand extending the measuring stick of the Constitution and common sense first looked closer to conviction.

On Friday night, July 3, at 10:15 p.m., the final post of the week went up. "Industrial electricity rates should be differentiated by region, making industrial electricity rates outside the capital area lower than those within it." Industrial electricity rates are the price of power used by factories and companies, and differentiation means setting different rates by introducing variations. The idea was to price power differently by region so factories outside the capital region pay less.

Power plants generating electricity are concentrated in regional areas and along coasts, but high consumers of that power are concentrated in the capital region. Noting that legislation was already in place, he wrote there was no reason to delay, adding that because other countries like those in Europe already practice it, there was no cause to fear side effects. One answer asserted that since the law exists, only execution remains; another held that because other nations already do it, there is nothing to fear. They were two answers cutting off the worries of the opposing side in advance.

When electricity rates drop, regional areas catch companies' eyes when deciding where to build factories. When factories arrive, jobs follow, and when people earn a living, they don't leave. Stories of young people leaving their hometowns in search of work aren't unfamiliar in Busan either. Of course, dividing and pricing power inevitably creates a side bearing a heavier burden, so it's a proposal that may not be welcome to factories in the capital region.

Regional cities have long watched the flow of people, money, and factories concentrating solely toward the capital area. Busan lies outside that center, and Buk-gu is one neighborhood in that Busan. The last word of the week that came out Friday night was electricity rates.

In six days, he spoke in turn of the West Sea from twenty-four years ago, Gwangju from forty-six years ago, a bill whose very name was unfamiliar, and factory electricity rates. They seem like far-flung stories. Yet laid over one another, the question converges into one: Whom does the state care for? And how are those costs shared, and by whom?

Whether it is the state taking responsibility for the mental suffering of those who defended the nation at sea, or factories in the capital and regions paying different electricity rates, both come down to deciding where the nation spends what it gathers and whose burden it lightens first. One side is paying off a debt owed by the nation; the other is spreading the country's livelihood evenly. These aren't tasks that bring immediate votes or finish tomorrow, but questions that shape the nation's direction over the long haul.

Uniforms and electricity rates meet inside that question.

July 3 was a Friday, thirty days after Election Day. With that Friday night post, the week drew to a close, and summer in Busan was just beginning. What would remain after the lawmaker's first summer passed—that answer still lay inside the summer.

Epilogue: A Question 100 Days Later

July 3, 2026

At 10:15 p.m. on Friday, July 3, 2026, a post was uploaded to Han Dong-hoon's Facebook page. It argued for setting industrial electricity rates differently by region to lower prices outside the capital region. He wrote that there was no reason to delay since the relevant law was already in place, and that side effects weren't a concern because other countries were already doing it. From afar, it might seem like a story about numbers on a bill, but in a city striving to hold on to its factories, jobs were at stake.

Busan, where he resides, is one such city. A single post won't change the rate card. But it shows where the new lawmaker's eyes are focused. It was the night thirty days after the election ended, and counting from March 26, it was the exact 100th day.

At the start of those 100 days lay time spent outside the party. On January 29, the People Power Party expelled the man who had once led it, and on March 26, he was passing through spring without belonging to any party. On April 14, a move-in notification form was placed on the counter of the Mandeok 2-dong Community Service Center. On the day a single line of address entered the nation's official ledger, he wrote that he would do politics in Busan Buk-gu until the end. That same day, he also posted calling himself a resident of Mandeok.

In the same alleyways, neighbors' hands offering salt bread coexisted with watchful eyes questioning whether it was just a move before an election. On May 15, he registered as an independent candidate. It was a three-way contest competing against Democratic Party candidate Ha Jeong-woo and People Power Party candidate Park Min-shik—an election fought without a party nomination or an organization to run beside him. All that remained were his own body and his own words.

Days followed where dozens of posts were uploaded to Facebook daily, and greetings shared in the alleyways piled up into records.

On June 3, the ballot boxes closed and the vote counting stretched past midnight. For a long while after counting began, his name did not take the lead. He must have watched those few hours with bated breath. At around 1:52 a.m. on June 4, his vote tally led for the first time. At that moment, the gap was 578 votes. That happened while ballot boxes from Mandeok, Gupo, and Deokcheon were being opened. When the counting was completely finished, the margin had widened to 1,392 votes, or 1.70 percentage points.

The final count stood at 35,056 votes (42.96 percent) for Han Dong-hoon, 33,664 votes (41.26 percent) for Ha Jeong-woo, and 12,866 votes (15.76 percent) for Park Min-shik.

42.96 percent is a number that falls short of half. The votes he earned were a little over four out of ten, while nearly six were stamped next to the names of the other two candidates. The 1,392 votes delivered an election certificate, but not majority support. That dawn, cheers and sighs must have broken out in the very same neighborhood. Alongside the choice of 35,056 people stood a different choice of 57 percent. To the person receiving congratulations for winning, that number must have also been remaining homework.

On June 5, he entered the National Assembly for the first time as an independent lawmaker. On June 22, he introduced his first bill. It was an amendment to the Board of Audit and Inspection Act to subject the National Election Commission to the Board's performance audits—the first bill chosen by someone who had just crossed the dawn of 1,392 votes. To someone who learned the weight of a single vote through dawn's numbers, the affairs of an election management agency could not be someone else's business. Verbal criticism turned into a document submitted to the National Assembly.

Even when July arrived, his posts did not stop. On the first day, he wrote that while using the May 18 Gwangju Democratization Movement as subject matter for jeering at a high school baseball game was wrong, the six-month suspension handed down to young students was excessive. The next day, regarding the so-called 77 Law, he acknowledged that a politician like himself would be a beneficiary, yet wrote that he opposed it as a matter of the Constitution and common sense. And on the night of the third day, the post about electricity rates was published.

The question of whether he would return to the People Power Party found no answer within these 100 days. Only his statement in an interview that he would align with the clock of public sentiment serves as a substitute for an answer. The 100 days opened by expulsion closed without deciding on his party reinstatement.

Between the move-in notification form placed on the counter in Mandeok 2-dong and the desk in the National Assembly Members' Hall lie these 100 days. The desk is in Yeouido, Seoul, and the single line of address is written in Mandeok, Buk-gu, Busan. Does a person who moves their address become a resident or a candidate? To the question left by the spring counter, the 100 days answered only half. He became a candidate, and passing through the dawn vote count, he became a lawmaker. The four letters spelling 'independent' remained attached before his name even on the day he entered the Assembly.

However, whether he became a resident is not a question an election certificate can answer. The April 14 promise that he would do politics in Busan Buk-gu until the end has just passed its first thirty days as a lawmaker, and the neighbors who will watch to see if that promise is kept still live in the alleyways of Mandeok. This record stops at a single post on the night of the 100th day. Does the person who became a lawmaker remain a resident

to the end?

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