

Reality check

DID LIBERALS OBSTRUCT AGENDA?

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The Conservative government says the appointment of five new Tory senators will shift the balance in the upper house and end Liberal obstruction of their “tough on crime” agenda.

“I have a busy criminal law agenda but, [after] getting it stuck in the Senate and having it bogged down there for month after month, I know the game that they are playing,” Justice Minister Rob Nicholson told a news conference yesterday.

Liberal senators “are trying to stall these things and they are doing the dirty work for the Liberals in the House of Commons.”

In fact, the Conservatives introduced 17 bills as part of their criminal justice platform during the last session. Some of them came back for the second time after dying on the order paper when Prime Minister Stephen Harper took the country into an election in the fall of 2008.

Two of those bills — one that tackles organized crime and another that ends the granting of double credit for jail time served before a verdict — have been passed by the Senate and are now the law.

The rest died when Mr. Harper prorogued Parliament in December.

Of the 15 “urgently needed” bills still on the order paper at that time, just three had reached the Senate. One of them, the bill to repeal the faint hope clause, was passed by the House of Commons in late November and reached the Senate just two weeks before the Christmas break.

A bill that would create a separate offence for motor vehicle theft was passed by the House of Commons in June and is languishing in the Senate. A bill that would impose harsher sentences for drug crimes was modified by senators in December — prompting much outrage from Mr. Nicholson.

None of the remaining 12 bills on the Conservative criminal justice agenda had been passed in the House of Commons before prorogation, and most of them had never been brought before the Commons for discussion.

Mr. Nicholson says he will reintroduce the bills in their pre-prorogation state some time after Parliament returns in March. In the case of the bill that was revised by the Senate, he says it will come back in the state it was passed by the House of Commons.

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