

## Prorogation won't halt bill to scrap gun registry, or much else

Tue Jan. 05 2010 7:32:33 AM

Joan Bryden, *The Canadian Press*

OTTAWA — Gun control advocates briefly hoped Prime Minister Stephen Harper's decision to prorogue Parliament would kill a controversial private member's bill to scrap the long gun registry.

But their hopes have been shot down, thanks to procedural reforms introduced 15 years ago.

The bill -- which was under examination by a parliamentary committee after winning first and second reading votes in the House of Commons -- will simply return at that stage once the new session of Parliament opens March 3.

Until the mid-1990s, proroguing or suspending Parliament wiped the legislative slate. All bills, no matter how many months they'd been debated or how close they'd been to passing, died on the order paper.

If the government wanted to bring back a bill in the new session of Parliament, it had to start all over again from square one. But that's no longer the case.

Private members' bills, such as Manitoba Tory MP Candice Hoepfner's gun registry bill, are all automatically reinstated at the same point in the legislative process where they left off.

Government-sponsored bills require the majority consent of the Commons to be reinstated but that's typically been accomplished with little trouble.

"For a fleeting moment, I was hopeful (the gun registry bill was dead) but it was clarified pretty quickly," said Wendy Cukier, president of the Coalition for Gun Control.

"We got lots of joyful email and then we looked into it further and realized that we were no further ahead than we were before."

Indeed, Cukier said prorogation actually leaves gun control advocates further behind, in the sense that they'll have no parliamentary forum for two months in which to counter the "misinformation" campaign mounted by the Tories against the registry.

While prorogation won't have much impact on bills wending their way through the Commons, it will cause some delays on the Senate side.

Bills that had not made it entirely through Senate debates, committee hearings and votes at the time of prorogation will have to go back to the starting line in the upper chamber.

From Harper's perspective, that's not entirely a bad thing.

He's railed incessantly against the Liberal-dominated Senate holding up or meddling with government legislation. But with the prime minister poised to fill five vacancies as early as this week, the Tories will outnumber Liberals in the Senate by the time Parliament resumes.

In the long run, that will presumably help speed the passage of the Conservative government's legislation.

Moreover, prorogation breaks the impasse that had developed last month between the government and the Senate over two bills.

Liberal senators had insisted on amending a Tory tough-on-crime bill to remove mandatory minimum sentences for people convicted of growing fewer than 200 marijuana plants. And they insisted on amending a consumer protection bill to shield home-business operators from sweeping search and seizure provisions.

The government was unlikely to accept the Senate amendments. And that set the stage for a potentially prolonged and fruitless game of parliamentary ping-pong, with the two bills bouncing repeatedly back and forth between the two chambers.

But prorogation means those amendments cease to exist and both bills will head back to the legislative starting line in the Senate.