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Tories vow crackdown on white-collar crime

Liberals say it's time to stop talking and act

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OTTAWA—Fraudsters and other white-collar criminals would face mandatory minimum jail terms, longer sentences and confiscation of assets under new legislation the Harper government plans to introduce this fall.

Justice Minister Rob Nicholson made the announcement yesterday while standing with victims of white-collar crime, and blamed the opposition for delays in introducing such measures.



ADRIAN WYLD/THE CANADIAN PRESS FILE PHOTO
Justice Minister Rob Nicholson blamed opposition for delays in introducing legislation.

"I don't have to tell you how difficult it is to get anything passed in the criminal justice area in a minority parliament," he said, adding it is "not a priority" with the three opposition parties.

The allegation drew a swift rebuke from Liberal justice critic Dominic LeBlanc, who accused the government of using victims as props for political reasons. LeBlanc said his party agrees with the general thrust of the proposals.

"We wish the minister would actually introduce legislation ... and not call their ninth news conference on the same topic," he said.

Nicholson called the bill just the first step in the government's crackdown, but gave no details on sentences or specific crimes.

He said the government also plans to change the rule that allows white-collar criminals parole after serving one-sixth of their sentence.

A renewed focus on white-collar crime comes after Montreal investment dealer Earl Jones was charged with fraud in July for allegedly operating a Ponzi scheme that swindled about 150 investors of at least \$30 million. On Monday, two Alberta men were charged with operating another Ponzi-type scheme that netted about \$100 million.

Financial analyst Diane Urquhart, who is teaming up with former Toronto police fraud Det. Gary Logan in pressing for more enforcement, said stiffer sentences are needed. But sentences "mean nothing" unless enforcement, with more fraud officers, is stepped up, she said.

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