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## Inmates to keep pensions for now

N.S. still looking into halting cheques for prisoners here

By STEPHEN MAHER Staff Reporter

When Ottawa starts taking pension cheques from prisoners on Jan. 1, inmates in Nova Scotia's jails won't feel the pinch because the province has yet to decide if it wants to co-operate with Ottawa on the scheme.

Parliament unanimously passed a bill this year that will strip Old Age Security and Guaranteed Income Supplement cheques from federal inmates — who serve sentences of two years or more — and those prisoners in provincial institutions serving 90 days or more.

But to stop the cheques to the provincial inmates, Ottawa needs to know who they are. So far, five provinces have agreed to provide the information, but Manitoba, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and Quebec have yet to agree.

Provincial Justice Minister Ross Landry wants to take a few months to figure out what the administrative cost will be, and also consider the social impact, said department spokeswoman Donna Chislett.

"We are still examining this issue," Chislett said. "He certainly didn't say he's against anything."

The issue of prisoners receiving pension cheques came to light when it was revealed that serial killer Clifford Olson was about to start receiving his cheques, which prompted a petition campaign from the Canadian Taxpayers Federation demanding a change to the law.

Kevin Lacey, Atlantic director of the group, said he doesn't know why the province doesn't make up its mind.

"It's time for Justice Minister Ross Landry to say whether he will protect the interests of criminals or those of taxpayers," Lacey said. "The payments are intended to assist seniors with living expenses. Since the living expenses of inmates are already fully paid by taxpayers, these additional federal payments are unjustifiable."

The province is dragging its feet, said Cecil Clarke, the justice critic for the provincial Progressive Conservatives.

"That's not a complicated, costly measure to have to deal with for an administrative burden," Clarke said. "Quite frankly, it's very easy to get that information as regards to who's receiving cheques in our institutions. It seems more like a stall tactic than something about

the practicalities of implementing what the public views as an important measure for those who are convicted offenders receiving benefits they shouldn't receive."

On average, there are 449 provincial inmates at any given time. Few of them are likely over the age of 65, said Chislett.

The provincial Liberal party declined to comment on the issue Wednesday.

The federal Tories hope Nova Scotia will soon agree to provide the names and dates of birth of provincial inmates.

"It's an important piece of legislation," said Ryan Sparrow, spokesman for federal Human Resources Minister Diane Finley. "It puts taxpayers ahead of prisoners and we hope all provinces support it. It's disappointing that Nova Scotia has not yet."

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