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Romney, Huckabee to Visit Guantanamo Bay

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BOSTON --Gov. Mitt Romney and Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee plan to visit on Friday the U.S. military prison in Guantanamo Bay, where they'll tour the detention center, attend an intelligence briefing and meet with Defense Department officials.

Romney, chairman of the Republican Governors Association, and Huckabee, who chairs the National Governors Association, are both Republicans weighing a run for president in 2008.

The one-day trip is an opportunity for them to see how the prison operates and to share ideas on the way their state prisons are run, Romney spokesman Eric Fehrstrom said.

A Pentagon spokesman said state officials and others regularly visit the base on fact-finding missions and to give input. The governors were invited by the DOD and will travel to the prison on a military aircraft, said Lt. Col. John A. Skinner.

"This type of transparency allows people to see first hand the environment at Guantanamo versus relying on often false portrayals," Skinner said.

Romney's chief of staff Beth Myers, Massachusetts Correction Commissioner Kathleen M. Dennehy and Arkansas' Corrections Department director Larry Norris also plan to go.

Besides touring the facility and attending a briefing, the governors are planning to have lunch with home-state troops stationed there.

Roughly 500 detainees, accused of links to Afghanistan's ousted Taliban regime or al-Qaida, are being held at the prison in Cuba. Most were taken in the aftermath of the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan following the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.

The U.S. government has been criticized for the treatment of detainees at Guantanamo Bay. It has denied any abuse there. The United Nations recently urged the White House to shut down the detention center. President Bush rejected the idea.

Romney and Huckabee recently were together in Memphis, Tenn., at the Southern Republican Leadership Conference. In a presidential straw poll conducted there, Romney came in second with 14 percent and Huckabee came in sixth with four percent. Sen. Bill Frist, R-Tenn., came in first with 37 percent.

Earlier this year, Huckabee visited American military personnel in countries including Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan with a group of three other governors.