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## **Romney Say Conditions Hard for Military Serving in Guantanamo Bay**

Glen Johnson  
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BOSTON --Gov. Mitt Romney, just back from a trip to the Guantanamo Bay terrorist prison camp in Cuba, said Monday he was surprised by the stressful conditions faced by troops from Massachusetts stationed there.

"It is not as stressful as being under fire in a place like Iraq or Afghanistan, but it's very close to it," Romney told reporters after speaking at a Statehouse ceremony.

Romney also said his correction commissioner, Kathleen Dennehy, who joined him on the trip, had offered suggestions for how to better run the Department of Defense facility.

Both Romney's remarks prompted criticism from the president of the state's 5,000-member correction officer union, who contended the trip was little more than a political junket for Romney, who is considering a run for the Republican presidential nomination.

Joining Romney in Guantanamo was Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee, a fellow Republican who is also mulling a White House bid.

The union also complained that Romney does not have a good track record on prison issues, noting he had to convene an independent panel to review prison conditions in Massachusetts after pedophile former priest John Geoghan was murdered inside a state jail by a fellow inmate in 2003.

"I don't know what qualifies this guy to even think he's an authority of prisons," said Steve Kenneway, president of the Massachusetts Correction Officers Federated Union.

Kenneway, who served in the Gulf War and in Iraq in 2003, retired in December after 21 years in the Army. He complained that Romney had not been in a state prison while governor. Eric Fehrstrom, the governor's communications director, said Romney had visited a prerelease center in Boston and spoken in the parking lot of the Souza-Baranowski Correctional Center in Shirley.

In addition, Fehrstrom said Romney had been inside MCI-Concord, one of the state's 18 correctional facilities, while a law student at Harvard.

"He wants to talk about the stress on the military officers; what about the stress on the corrections officers here in Massachusetts?" Kenneway said. "I can't think of a bigger dog-and-pony show and if I were in the military, I'd be outraged."

Guantanamo Bay, located at the southeastern tip of Cuba, is home to 500 people accused of having links to al-Qaida and other terrorists groups. The United Nations has demanded it be closed but the Bush administration has rejected those calls, arguing the prisoners can provide needed terrorist intelligence.

During the visit, which came at the end of a work week in which Romney spent all but one day out of state on personal political business, the governors toured the detainment camp and had lunch

with active-duty personnel from their home states. Romney ate with three or four, according to his staff.

While Romney was governor in 2003 and 2004, 319 members of the Massachusetts National Guard also were deployed to Guantanamo.

"I was very impressed with the quality of the leadership at Guantanamo but also came to recognize that the stress that our troops serve under is extreme," he said. "The detainees there are a pretty tough group of people and present a very high level of stress for our troops."

He said that while he did not speak with any detainees, "I found that the detainees, to the extent I was able to observe this, were treated in a very responsible and humanitarian way, and came away with no concerns with regards to the fair and appropriate treating of those individuals."

Romney also Dennehy offered suggestions for improving the facility but refused to elaborate saying it goes to the security of the facility.

Dennehy was in Texas on Monday attending a corrections conference and was not available for comment, said DOC spokesman Paul Henderson.