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Ark. Governor Says Detainees Being Treated Fairly at Guantanamo

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LITTLE ROCK (AP) - Muslim inmates at the Guantanamo Bay terrorist detainee camp in Cuba are getting food that takes account of their religious beliefs, Gov. Mike Huckabee says, and their cells are marked with an arrow toward Mecca so they can pray in that direction.

The prisoners are being treated fairly by the U.S. government, Huckabee said Monday after returning from a trip to the camp.

"I left the experience with an intense respect for the men and women serving our country at the facility," Huckabee wrote in a message posted on his Web site. "The detainees they deal with are extremely dangerous, and make their feelings toward our country loudly known. They speak openly regarding their delight (in) 9-11, supporting terrorist actions against our country."

The soldiers guarding the prisoners are subjected to constant scorn and mocking, Huckabee said. But, despite that, he wrote, "our troops do their jobs with an extraordinary professionalism, and I was proud to see their resolve to do the right thing."

Huckabee and Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney visited the camp along with Arkansas Correction Director Larry Norris and Massachusetts' correction commissioner, Kathleen Dennehy. The trip was intended for the governors to see how the prison operates and to share ideas on the way their state prisons are run.

Huckabee said he thinks the detainees' cells at Guantanamo are more comfortable than many cells in Arkansas' state prisons.

Huckabee said that, during his tour of the facility, the governors witnessed the interrogation of a detainee who was suspected of having ties to terrorist organizations.

"Instead of whips and torture, we saw a lengthy, yet polite exchange between interrogators and the detainee," Huckabee said. "Interrogators were attempting to build a feeling of trust between themselves and the detainee, a technique that has worked in the past to extract helpful information from these individuals."

Huckabee and Romney, both Republicans, have both said they're considering a run for president in 2008. Huckabee, who is term-limited and cannot run for re-election as governor, leaves office in January.

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 governor said he met with several Arkansans serving at the detainee camp, but said he couldn't share their names because of fear of retribution by terrorists against their families.

"The likelihood of such personal and dreadful attacks is one of the many reasons such a detainment and interrogation process remains necessary in Cuba," Huckabee said.

