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3 U.S. Lawmakers Tour Guantanamo Prison

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GUANTANAMO BAY NAVAL BASE, Cuba -- Three more U.S. lawmakers defended the American prison for terror suspects Wednesday after touring the detention center that has drawn worldwide calls for its closure because of alleged abuse of detainees.

The congressmen, two Republicans and a Democrat, said it appeared to them that detainees are treated well and that the lockup on the U.S. Naval base at the southeastern edge of Cuba should remain open.

"All of those stories that we have heard, I didn't find any evidence of those things being true," said Rep. Tom Price, R-Ga. "I think those are old, old stories so I couldn't be more pleased with what our government is doing."

Rep. Jeff Miller, R-Fla., said he was impressed with the conditions for the approximately 520 detainees at the prison.

"The medical care is excellent, probably better than any of them have gotten before," Miller said. "I have viewed many correctional facilities in the United States ... and I would put this facility up against any I have ever been in."

U.S. lawmakers from both major parties and even American allies have expressed concern about claims that interrogators have abused and tortured inmates and the fact that most detainees have been held for more than three years without being charged.

Critics have also said that allegations that U.S. guards have mishandled the Quran will help terrorists recruit Muslims around the world and fuel anti-American sentiment.

In Denmark on Wednesday, President Bush defended the treatment of prisoners at Guantanamo in response to concerns raised by Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen,

"The prisoners are well-treated in Guantanamo. There's total transparency," Bush said. "These people are being treated humanely. There are very few prison systems around the world that have seen such scrutiny as this one."

Dozens of U.S. lawmakers and other visitors have toured Guantanamo in recent months as part of a military effort to refute allegations that detainees have been mistreated and that guards have mishandled the Quran.

Republicans and Democrats have said after visiting the detention facility that the United States has made progress in improving conditions and protecting detainees' rights, though two senators have said that said Congress could devise more precise rules to help ensure prisoners would not be abused.

During a media tour Wednesday, military officials said that guards are trained to take extreme steps to avoid handling the Muslim holy book in the cell of each detainee and that military police have showed restraint as inmates have hurled bodily fluids at them in the highest security area of the detention center.

Clive Stafford Smith, a lawyer who represents 42 detainees, dismissed the tours as "propaganda," and said the military has failed to allow inmates to have "meaningful" contact with defense attorneys. He believes conditions have improved since the prison camp opened but that inmates are still deprived of basic rights.

"There is no doubt that for the good of the United States, Guantanamo should be closed down," Smith said after visiting a client Wednesday. "We say we stand for the rule of law and what do we do? We lock them up in Cuba for God's sake."

Rep. Bob Etheridge, a North Carolina Democrat who was part of the delegation that toured the base, said closing Guantanamo is not an option. "Where do you put them? Where do you send them? What do you do with them?" he said. "I think that's a question you have to ask."