

**(WASHINGTON)-----** Congressman Allen West (FL-22) reflects on Guantanamo Bay Naval Base after returning from an in-depth briefing on the detention facility on Monday:

"I returned late last evening from a daylong very informative trip, touring the Guantanamo Bay Naval Base and Joint Task Force detainment facility. I commend RADM Jeffrey Harbeson for commanding a first rate professional operation under the most stressful and highly observed circumstances.

As a member of the House Armed Services Committee and a 22-year combat veteran, I was supremely impressed with the brave men and women who serve at Guantanamo Bay and the mission-critical work they are doing to detain terrorists and individuals suspected with terrorist ties. Guantanamo Bay serves a crucial role in our national security and I am now more confident than ever of its importance and the need to continue to operate in the foreseeable future.

We must ask ourselves, are we engaged in a war or a criminal action? If the former, then we are dealing with unlawful enemy combatants, not criminals. The leadership of this nation is confused in understanding the delineation between the two and therefore convey a serious lack of comprehension of the complexity of the modern 21st century battlefield. Unlawful enemy combatants are not American citizens and therefore not privy to our constitutional rights.

While I was visiting Guantanamo Bay Naval Base and the detention facilities, I found detainees who have first class medical care, access to 21 satellite TV stations, and bountiful meals. These conditions are far better than what our ten American Soldiers imprisoned at Fort Leavenworth are receiving. Knowing that a GITMO detainee, 24-year-old Omar Khadr, found guilty of murder of a U.S. serviceman and several other war-crimes, will serve one more year at GITMO, and then be released to Canada, is reprehensible.

GITMO also has a state of the art \$12 million courtroom which has only been used approximately seven days since its opening. What is even more unbelievable is that this is a secure facility requiring 24/7 military guard.

While I was being briefed at GITMO, President Barack Obama released a statement saying he has issued a new code for treatment of prisoners and will resume military trials for detainees.

The President will be ending a two year ban he instituted when he initially took office. Clearly the President has recognized what I saw firsthand, that GITMO needs to remain open while resuming military trials.

While this is a positive step in the right direction, I am concerned that the President continues to go around the U.S. Congress when it comes to planning a legal framework for the prosecution and detention of terrorists held at Guantanamo Bay. It is only by working with Armed Services Chairman Buck McKeon and other members of Congress, that the United States can responsibly and thoroughly establish a procedure to bring terrorists swiftly to justice."