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Paul father and son differ on issue of closing Guantanamo

By: Seth McLaughlin – April 17, 2013

Sen. Rand Paul may hope to inherit his father's political movement, but he is staking out different positions on issues of major importance to those followers, including saying Wednesday that he was not ready to close the Guantanamo Bay prison.

Speaking to reporters at a breakfast hosted by the Christian Science Monitor, Mr. Paul, a tea party favorite and 2016 presidential contender, said that he is still torn on what to do with some of the enemy combatants captured overseas.

"I don't know that I have a great answer, to tell you the truth," said the Kentucky Republican, later adding, "I have not come down on the position of closing Guantanamo Bay."

Hours later, his father launched the Ron Paul Institute For Peace and Prosperity billed as "the next phase in the Ron Paul Movement" at the Capitol Hill Club where the elder Mr. Paul made it clear that he thinks the detention facility has damaged the nation's image abroad, operated outside the law and should be closed.

"I think Guantanamo is not an American system," said the 77-year-old former congressman and Libertarian icon. The prison, he said, has become a symbol for torture and, more recently, secret renditions.

"I think that will be one of the toughest things to deal with because I imagine the numbers are against us on that," said Mr. Paul, alluding to the thorny politics of the issue.

"But when people understand this connection with foreign policy and civil liberties, I think they would come around. We lose so much more by holding 100 people in Guantanamo and clinging to a system that is so un-American."

The younger Mr. Paul told reporters at the breakfast Wednesday that he is "considering" running for president just like his father, who made back-to-back bids for the GOP presidential nomination in 2008 and 2012.

Along the way, the elder Mr. Paul won a loyal following with his civil libertarian stances

and the non-interventionist approach to foreign policy. That, however, never translated into much success in the primaries.

The elder Paul left his seat in the House last year after serving 12 terms as a Texas lawmaker. He said Wednesday he will continue his work "unshackled by the restrictions of government service" through the Peace and Prosperity Institute, a group dedicated to, among other things, educating younger generations on the merits of foreign policy non-interventionism.

The younger Mr. Paul, meanwhile, hopes to occupy some of the same philosophical ground, while expanding his appeal with the GOP electorate that shied away from his father's libertarian politics and Democrats that tend to write off Republicans.

The two men agree on many big issues, though they have staked out different positions on sanctions against Iran, and now comes the dueling views over Guantanamo.

President Obama campaigned on closing Guantanamo during his 2008 campaign, but his efforts have been stymied by Congress. More than 10 years after the facility opened on the southeastern tip of Cuba it remains in use. The U.S. is holding 166 men there, according to the American Civil Liberties Union.

For human rights advocates, the prison has become a symbol of the excesses of the war on terror. Supporters of the prison, meanwhile, have said that it is too risky to release the suspected terrorists or transfer them to other facilities because they could pose a threat to the U.S. and even return to the battlefield.

"It is a question of priorities and what do you prioritize in terms of moral principles, legal commitments and each person's interpretation of the security risks," said Christopher A. Preble, vice president for defense and foreign policy studies at the Cato Institute.

The younger Mr. Paul said Wednesday that he is not sure how to handle some of the suspected terrorists that have been captured in the war on terrorism.

"If you are overseas and you are captured in a battlefield and you are shooting at us, I think you get no due process probably zero due process if you are firing a weapon at us, or you are involved in a battle," Mr. Paul said. "Then there is sort of a murky, in between, of those who we think are committing battle during the daytime and now are sleeping in a house at night. So what do you do when you capture those people? Where do you take them? Do you bring them to the U.S.? Do you have to have due process? There are a lot of questions and I don't think there are easy questions on this, but I have not come down on the position of closing Guantanamo Bay."

Asked about his son's reluctance to close the prison later, Mr. Paul said, "I don't talk to

him in detail for the precise reason that I am not looking to sort that all out because he has his opinions.

"You will have to ask him where he disagrees not me," he said.