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Gov. Bentley said he had nothing to do with security chief pay and promotion

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Gov. Robert Bentley *Charles J. Dean* |

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MONTGOMERY, Alabama – Gov. Robert Bentley said neither he nor anyone on his behalf played any role in what some see as the questionable promotion of his chief of security to the rank of lieutenant.

However Bentley strongly said that now Lt. Wendell Ray Lewis is deserving of the promotion even though by Alabama Department of Public Safety standards for such promotion he did not qualify.

Sunday my colleague John Archibald reported that Alabama State Trooper, Wendell Ray

Lewis "seemed to receive special treatment while standing guard over Gov. Bentley, was promoted from sergeant to lieutenant last month even though he tested lower than many others on the lieutenant's test. He was listed in the 'third band' of potential promotions (the first is where you want to be) and did not score among the top 10 tested. He was, the way troopers understand the rules, simply 'unpromotable,'" wrote Archibald.

Earlier Archibald had reported that Lewis had made \$16,918 in August, thanks to overtime he earned following the governor across the globe. Lewis' overtime in August pushed his actual pay for the fiscal year to \$153,000 with a month to go. That's almost \$50,000 more than the colonel who runs the Department of Public Safety made in the same time period.

Here is what the governor said when I asked him about Lewis' overtime and questionable promotion.

"...I have nothing to do with the pay of any of my employees, including my security people. I do not have anything to do with that. I did not have anything to do with overtime. I know that they work hard when we go to Europe, go to different parts of the world or just around here. They work hard because I work hard and they have to guard me because we have people that threaten me. I had nothing to do with their pay. I had nothing to do with their promotion."

Bentley said he did recommend that Lewis be made the head of his security detail, a job that also makes him head of the Capitol police force.

"I saw his ability to lead," Bentley said of Lewis, who he praised as having worked to put together the best security detail and Capitol police force the state has ever had.

"We have a unit now that is like the Secret Service, the best it's ever been. I saw what he could do so we put all security under him and the Capitol police under him. It's a tedious amount of responsibility. ...He's the man for the job. He is a man of honor and integrity and I support him one hundred percent."

I asked the governor that after handing Lewis all those duties had there been any discussion of promoting him. He said there had not been but he also said that he should have been promoted regardless of the results of the lieutenant's test.

Bentley compared the results of the test to the exam used to judge qualifications for medical school, especially when a student with a 4.0 grade point average in college does not quite knock the medical school entrance exam out of the park.

"He should have been elevated because ...of all the responsibility he had," Bentley said of Lewis. "It's like, if you had a four-point (GPA) in college but you don't do as well on your

MCAT, should you get in medical school? Absolutely you should. That (test) is not always the reason someone is promoted."