## The Daily Tar Heel

## Officials brace for potential base closures

## BY MARK PUENTE STAFF WRITER

State officials are keeping their fingers crossed over the future of North Carolina's military bases as a federal board gears up to debate the fate of every U.S. military installation. In mid-March, President Bush

will charge the independent Base Realignment and Closure Commission, which last convened in 1995, with deciding which bases to shut down.

As a result, Gov. Mike Easley has called on Lt. Gov. Beverly Perdue to prepare the state for any possible closures, along with coordinating any responses to the BRAC decisions. "We believe North Carolina is

doing all the right things," said Lew Borman, a spokesman for Perdue. "We're not taking anything for granted, but everything is up for grabs."

Officials are optimistic that BRAC won't shut any N.C. bases during this round of closings because of the state's role in the

"I think we're in good shape," said Rep. Walter Jones, R-N.C. "The military knows North Carolina appreciates having the bases in our state."

More than 100,000 service members are stationed in North Carolina, whose mammoth bases contribute more than \$18 billion to the state economy, according to

a study conducted by East Carolina University. Businesses in 77 of North Carolina's 100 counties have ties to military contracts. The quality-of-life factor is a rea-

son the state fares so well in being able to sustain military growth, Jones said.

"North Carolina is one of the best places to live in when serving," he said. "It's known by all who have worn the uniform.

If any of the bases close, the economic impact would be severe down east in a region that has been hit hard by the loss of thousands of textile jobs.

And Tar Heel politicians in the nation's capital, which is highly polarized, have set aside political

beliefs to join forces to keep the bases open. Members of North Carolina's

Congressional delegation attended a meeting last week organized by Republican Sen. Elizabeth Dole.

She brought together Jones, Sen. Richard Burr, R-N.C., Rep. G.K. Butterfield, D-N.C. and Perdue to lobby the Pentagon's point man, Phil Grone, on base closings. Grone is the deputy undersecretary of defense for installations and environment.

"As a delegation, support for our state and our military installations transcends party lines," Dole stated in a press release. "We have been working tirelessly to build on our

strengthen the future of our proud facilities and airspace; the ability to installations."

Lobbying also will take place outside the nation's capital.

During this week's congressional recess, Burr, the state's freshman senator, will tour Pope Air Force Base and the Cherry Point Marine Corps Air Station to keep the dialogue flowing about the importance of the bases.

"It's a priority to him," said Doug Heye, Burr's spokesman. "It's critical to do all we can to keep the bases open.

According to a Defense Department memo, BRAC looks at four main points: current and future mission capabilities; the availability and condition of land,

accommodate mobilization, surge and future total force requirements; and the cost of operations and manpower.

If bases do close, the state still could find a way to cope.

Because many are close to one another in the eastern part of the state, the ones that don't close could expand, providing educa-tional benefits to military members and their families.

"We think there are opportunities," Borman said. "North Carolina is America's military base, and it could be a national model."

> Contact the State & National Editor at stntdesk@unc.edu.

> > JUDUDUDUDU

6

Just 2 minutes

FREE DELIVERY

m the exter

from downtown

