

[Watt brings civics to life for Salisbury students](#) (Salisbury Post – April 19, 2011)

By Sarah Campbell

When Jason Adkins asked his civics classes at Salisbury High School to write letters to their legislators he expected a return letter or maybe even a phone call. Instead, U.S. Rep. **Mel Watt**, D-NC, volunteered to come speak his students. “I wanted them to know that the government is there to help them and it could be just a letter or a phone call away,” Adkins said. “One of the problems with society is that people feel disconnected to the federal government and Rep.

Watt

is here to bridge that gap today.” Adkins said he began the assignment with his students last semester as a way to facilitate the connection between people and government. “We are trying to get the kids thinking about the world around them,” he said.

Watt

kicked off his visit to Salisbury High by giving students an idea about how government works, explaining how the House of

Representatives and Senate

He said that in his more than 20 years in politics he’s learned a valuable lesson — he’s not going to get his way. “Patience and compromise, finding where that middle ground is where people are equally happy or equally unhappy with the result that you’ve reached I think has become most important to me over time.”

Talking about the issues

Watt spent the afternoon answering students’ questions about topics ranging from the environment to education. He explained how the federal government has set standards to drive the automobile industry to make cars more efficient. **Watt** also said the government fund public transportation such as busses, subways and high-speed rail systems as a green initiative. “The more we encourage people to leave their cars at home and take the bus, the less impact there is on the environment from the exhaust,”

Watt

said.

Watt

said there have also been steps taken to encourage people to make their homes and businesses more efficient. He mentioned low-income energy assistance programs and tax credits for those who install more energy efficient appliances. "We're trying to push people toward efficient use of energy sources so that it has less of an adverse impact on the environment." One student asked how raising taxes can benefit her.

Watt

explained the only means of income a government has is through taxes. He said the only way the government can build roads, offer Pell grants for students to go to college and provide health care for senior citizens is through taxes. "Just like in your own personal budget you can't set a budget just based on just what you spend ... you have to have some income coming from somewhere," he said. "The question is not whether we will tax, the question is who we will tax and how we will tax."

Watt

said that typically people who "earn more pay more." "We have what we call a progressive take, it's low on poor people and progresses up the higher your income is," he said.

Sophomore Ilisha Housch asked

Watt

how the disaster in Japan affects the U.S. economy.

Watt

replied by explaining how auto industry is already feeling the affects with production cuts for Toyota and Honda. "I think we've got to accept the notion that we are tied into the whole world's economy," he said. "Whatever happens anywhere in the world is going to have some impact on us here in the United States." Another student asked

Watt

what kind of changes he would like to see come to North Carolina. "I wish we could get the economy jump-started again," he said. "It's showing signs of doing that so we just have to be patient with it."

Getting personal

When one student asked **Watt** if he had his own body guards, he laughed and said no. "I don't have a driver or chauffeur, I don't have a limousine, I don't have a security person," he said.

"It's just me." Another student asked

Watt how he balanced his personal ideology with the viewpoints of his constituents. "I think I represent my own views and the people I serve," he said. "I think the great majority of the people I serve know that I will analyze the issue that comes before me and I will find the right answer."

Watt

said the ultimate question comes down to "do you lead your constituents or do they lead you." "There is no way for me to know what every citizen would like me to do," he said. "You've got a

decision to make and you've got to do what you think is right for the people you are representing."