

[Watt says redistricting will hurt minorities](#) (Salisbury Post – July 6, 2011)

By Karissa Minn

U.S. Rep. **Mel Watt** said in a statement Tuesday that state legislators have violated a law that protects minorities from discrimination in their proposed Congressional redistricting plan. “It represents a disappointing effort by the Republicans to dilute and minimize the political influence of

African-American voters in the Piedmont by packing all of them into the 12th District so none of them have influence in adjoining districts,” **Watt** said. “It also represents a sinister Republican effort to use African Americans as pawns in their effort to gain partisan, political gains in Congress.”

Watt is one of two African American federal representatives in North Carolina. Under the N.C. General Assembly’s proposal released Friday, **Watt**’s 12th Congressional District would lose ground in the northwestern and eastern parts of Rowan County and cut a narrower swath through the center. It would continue to snake from Charlotte north along Interstate 85 to Greensboro and take in parts of Winston-Salem. The black voting-age population in the 12th District would increase from the current 44 percent to just over 50 percent. **Watt** says lawmakers have violated the federal Voting Rights Act and court cases interpreting it, which forbid drawing districts that dilute minority voting strength. “The Republicans have gone out of their way to pack African-American voters into the 12th District and, in the process, have made race the compelling rationale for the proposed district,” **Watt** said in his statement. According to the General Assembly’s website, considerations of race can illegally dominate the redistricting process when majority-minority districts are drawn in a way that ignores traditional redistricting principles. Those principles include compactness, contiguity, respect for political subdivisions or communities of interest. In a statement released Friday, N.C. Sen. Bob Rucho and N.C.

Rep. David Lewis, chairs of their respective redistricting committees, said they sought input from **Watt** on options for revising the 12th District. “We have accommodated Congressman **Watt**’s

preference by agreeing to model the new Twelfth District after the current Twelfth District,” Rucho and Lewis said. To ensure that minority voters can continue to elect the candidates of their choice, the U.S. Justice Department or a federal court must approve or “preclear” redistricting plans in 40 North Carolina counties under Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act. Section 2 requires drawing districts with a majority minority population if certain conditions are present. Rucho and Lewis said in their statement that the current 12th District was drawn in 2001 “with the intention of making it a very strong Democratic district.” It is not a Section 2 district under the Voting Rights Act, but it includes part of one

county — Guilford — that is covered by Section 5. “We have drawn our proposed Twelfth District at a black voting age level that is above the percentage of black voting age population found in the current twelfth District,” they said. “We believe that this measure will ensure preclearance of the plan.” N.C. Sen. Andrew Brock, who represents Rowan and Davie counties and is vice chairman of the redistricting committee, said Friday that the districts abide by the Voting Rights Act. He said the districts take into account that urban areas such as Charlotte, Raleigh and Greensboro have grown in population more than other places in North Carolina over the past decade. That population growth meant districts with urban areas got geographically smaller while more rural districts grew. He also said Friday that partisan politics had nothing to do with how the proposed new lines were drawn.