

[Lawmakers say politics hinders tech development](#) (Charlotte Observer – October 29, 2011)

By Celeste Smith

In order to thrive, North Carolina's booming technology sector needs government support to educate future workers, and to spur research and development in the industry, speakers said at a Charlotte discussion Friday. Problem is, they said, partisan bickering among Washington lawmakers tends to get in the way. And that opinion came from local Washington lawmakers themselves. Democratic congressional representatives Larry Kissell of Montgomery County and **Mel Watt** of Charlotte, and Charlotte Republican Rep. Sue Myrick addressed members of the North Carolina Technology Association. The group's membership represents 500 companies in the industry, and nearly 100,000 technology employees in the state, according to the NCTA. Lawmakers tend to get along - and agree - at smaller, bipartisan gatherings, the representatives said. But on a broader level, partisan fighting causes gridlock. That keeps innovation from surfacing, Kissell said. Major biotechnology ideas struggle to get from labs to the commercial level, he said, because of impediments by the government in supporting research. Outside pressure has "become so heavy," **Watt** said, "that standing up for the Democratic or Republican party is more important than standing up for America." Myrick said the federal government needs to focus more on helping elementary school-age children catch up in the fields of science, technology, engineering and math. "We get more involved in higher education, as you know, than we do in public education," she said. "We've got to have guts as a Congress to stop doing the things we don't need to be doing." Other industry topics addressed at the discussion:

Cyber security: Helping businesses protect themselves is "high on my radar screen," Myrick said. "We have a tremendous international problem with hacking," she said. "Our intellectual property is being stolen."

Incentives: Government incentives to encourage research and development would help boost innovation in manufacturing, Kissell said. "We are who we are because of innovation throughout the centuries."

Economy: Although an NCTA speaker said the technology sector is thriving, **Watt** said more jobs in the private sector are needed to help the country "get out of this economic funk."