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"There is nothing more fundamental to our democracy than the right to vote and to have that vote matter," said North Carolina Attorney General Josh Stein. "Partisan gerrymandering was wrong and unlawful when the Supreme Court ruled on this case last year, and it remains wrong and unlawful today. North Carolina's constitution makes clear that all of the power belongs to the people, and that voters should choose their representatives, not the other way around. I urge the Court to not take the extraordinary step of overruling its previous decision and instead respect the rule of law by reaffirming that partisan gerrymandering violates our constitution and undermines our democracy."

Governor Cooper and Attorney General Stein's brief explains that granting Republican legislators' request to overturn the Court's recent decisions would be unprecedented in the Court's history, contrary to the Court's rules, and undermine the stability and legitimacy of the rule of law. The brief explains that "our State's elected representatives cannot be allowed to entrench themselves in power by manipulating district lines to insulate themselves from popular will." The Supreme Court's 2022 decisions "ensure that partisan gerrymandering does not fatally undermine the power of North Carolinians to govern themselves."

## Atrium and Best Buy Health Partner to Improve Experience When Receiving Care at Home

Partnership will help remove barriers for patients and providers to help enable care at home for everyone

Atrium Health ([atriumhealth.org](http://atriumhealth.org)) and Best Buy Health ([healthcare.bestbuy.com](http://healthcare.bestbuy.com)) are combining their strengths to develop new hospital at home offerings that will enhance the patient experience of receiving hospital-level care in the home. The goal of the partnership is to enable providers to deliver high-quality care to patients in the comfort of their own homes, while helping reduce emotional and financial burdens on patients and caregivers.

This partnership takes advantage of Atrium Health's leadership position in telemedicine, including a well-established hospital at home program, combined with a patient population of nearly 3 million people. When aligned with Best Buy Health's existing expertise and abilities - as well as Best Buy's strengths in innovative omnichannel experience, distinctive in-home service and world-class supply chain - together, Atrium Health and Best Buy Health will address the complex requirements of these programs, such as patient education and enabling technology in the home with the help of specially trained Geek Squad Agents to assist with logistics and technical support.

"We knew Atrium Health was the right partner to help tackle the unique challenges within the care at home experience," said Deborah Di Sanzo, president of Best Buy Health. "We're excited to leverage our expertise in omnichannel, supply chain, Caring Center support and services, in-home support and our ability to connect patients and providers through Current Health's care at home platform. Those strengths, combined with Atrium Health's extensive clinical expertise and deep experience leading in virtual care, will help us improve and enable care in the home for everyone."

"Our partnership with Best Buy Health will help change the lives of our patients and consumers, giving them access to the tools and experiences they need to receive care in the comfort of their own home," said Dr. Rasu Shrestha, chief innovation and commercialization officer at Advocate Health, of which Atrium Health is a part. "Our surveys show high levels of patient satisfaction for our hospital at home experience and the use of virtual care is a valuable tool in our efforts to eradicate both economic and geographic disparities in accessing health care services. Together with Best Buy Health, we will combine our strengths to provide better outcomes and equitable access for patients who will receive their care in the home. This will also allow for a more successful and seamless process for the providers caring for them."

Atrium Health launched its hospital at home program as a means to address patient surges during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. Atrium Health has since evolved the program to be able to care for such conditions as cardiac, COPD, pneumonia, asthma, various infections and other medical and post-operative conditions.

This partnership serves as another example of how Best Buy is continuing its work in the health space. Its care at home platform, Current Health ([www.currenthealth.com](http://www.currenthealth.com)), was added to the company's portfolio in 2021 and brings together remote patient monitoring, telehealth and patient engagement into a single solution for healthcare providers.

## English Ivy

When the leaves are off the trees in winter you can easily see all the English ivy vines growing up tree trunks. N.C. Cooperative Extension, Union County Center wants you to remove the English Ivy from your trees before it's too late. It's widely known that English ivy kills trees. This vine was brought to the U.S. as a groundcover, but left unchecked it grows straight up the trunks of trees. When English ivy gets into the canopy, it grows all the way out to the tips of branches and shades out the tree's own foliage, quickly killing entire large limbs. The ivy also adds a significant amount of extra weight, so tree limbs break more frequently during wind events. So if a large tree near your house has English ivy growing in it - that ivy will greatly increase the risk to your home.

Back on ground level, English ivy forms a dense carpet and outcompetes all other vegetation, part of the definition of an invasive species. It forms such a thick carpet that it even outcompetes the trees' roots for soil moisture and nutrients, yet another method by which English ivy kills trees. All of that ivy on a tree obscures your view of the tree's trunk and branches, so if the tree has a structural defect, you won't be able to see that problem until it is too late. And arborists frequently charge extra to prune or remove trees covered with English ivy because they basically have to strip off all of that ivy as they work or they can't do their job safely. So English ivy doesn't just kill trees, but it costs you extra money.

But killing the English ivy is not terribly difficult. Just cut the vines off the trunk as far as you can safely reach from the ground. The vines left dangling up in the canopy cannot sprout roots or reattach themselves, so they quickly die, the leaves of the vine will brown out and drop within a couple of months. The woody vines will dry up and lose weight, decreasing the stress on the tree within a couple of months. The dried-up vines become brittle and drop off over a couple of years. If you try to rip out the vines from the ground, you will probably snap off tree limbs unless you wait until they are dried up and brittle. Even then, it may be difficult so it may be best to just leave them. English ivy growing as ground cover smothers all other vegetation, so I'd recommend removing all the ivy on the ground as well. English ivy kills trees and costs you extra money, so get outside and remove the English ivy from your trees. *By Keith O'Herrin, Urban Forester*

## You Decide: How Worrisome is the National Debt?

By Mike Walden: When I speak to a variety of groups around the state, I know at least one of the questions likely to be asked: What are we going to do about the national debt? The national debt certainly does appear to be scary. It now stands at over \$31 trillion. This is more than the annual income of all businesses and workers in the country. Divided by the population, the national debt is more than \$9,000 per person, including both adults and children.

At the same time, we're worried about the size of the national debt, our national politicians are debating increasing the allowable size of the debt. Congress periodically sets a limit for the national debt, so when that limit is reached, Congress has to raise the limit to continue borrowing. This always creates intense debate over the debt, spending and taxes.

One worry is that if the debt limit isn't increased, there won't be enough money to fund all government programs. In particular, if interest payments on the national debt couldn't be paid, there could be a default on federal debt securities. If a default occurred, the stellar financial reputation of the United States government would be severely tarnished, and interest rates would rise.

With the national debt in the news, this is a good time to address key questions about it, thereby giving you information and perspective to decide how big of a debt problem we have.

- Is the national debt the same as individual debt? The short answer is "no." If I borrow money, I have limited time to repay the loan. One reason is that I have a limited time to live. This is not the case with our federal government. As long as our country continues, so does the federal government. The federal government can continually borrow new money to pay off old debt that has come due.
- Isn't much of the national debt owed to foreign countries? Can't they demand their money back at any time? Foreign investors currently own one-third of the national debt. Japan and China are the biggest foreign holders of U.S. debt, each owning around \$1 trillion of U.S. government debt. The investments - called Treasury securities - issued to fund the national debt have a designated time period at which they must be repaid. This is typical for any debt, such as mortgages or vehicle loans. Holders of U.S. Treasury securities can't demand their money back anytime they wish. They can, however, sell their Treasury securities to other investors.

- At some point, won't the federal government require citizens to pay their share of the national debt? This is highly unlikely. As indicated earlier, the federal government can always borrow more to pay off debt that has come due.

- But isn't this what's called a "Ponzi scheme," where new borrowing is continually used to pay existing investors? Aren't Ponzi schemes destined to eventually collapse? Ponzi schemes do collapse when existing investors want their money back, and the inflows of new money are insufficient to pay them. For the national debt, financial support to make interest payments is ultimately determined by the size and growth of the national economy.

- Still, with the national debt now larger than the annual value of the U.S. economy, won't the debt eventually cause our economy to collapse, therefore making interest payments on the national debt impossible for the federal government? What matters is not the size of the debt relative to the size of the economy. Instead, it is the size of annual interest payments on the debt relative to the size of the economy that is key. The same is true of private debt. For example, a lender looks at monthly interest payments on a home mortgage relative to the borrower's monthly income when evaluating the loan.

When interest payments on the national debt are compared to aggregate annual national income, the good news is the ratio is not at a record high. In fact, today's ratio stands at 2%, significantly under the recent peak of 3% in 1991. However, the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office predicts the interest payment/national income ratio will jump to over 7% by 2052.

- What can be done about the national debt? At its core, the national debt is a political issue based on collective decisions about spending and taxing. If spending and tax revenues don't match, borrowing fills the gap. However, for a long time, many economists have made a simple recommendation to make federal borrowing more logical. In the private economy, including both households and businesses, borrowing makes the most sense when it is done for long-lasting investments. Any financial expert will tell households not to borrow to pay for day-to-day expenses but to use it only for long-lasting purchases, like a home, vehicle or college education. These expenditures often provide a big payback and, therefore, can be considered investments.

The idea is, therefore, to limit federal government borrowing to large investments, such as for physical infrastructure (transportation is a good example) and even human infrastructure (education, medical research and medical emergencies like COVID). Indeed, most states already follow this idea.

The national debt will continue to be challenging and may even become a larger challenge. Do we need to panic or calmly make some logical changes? You decide.

## Wingate Physical Therapy Grads Post 97.5% Pass Rate

Wingate's most recent class of doctor of physical therapy grads posted an impressive 97.5 percent pass rate on the National Physical Therapy Exam, with 39 of the 40 members passing the licensure test on the first try. The pass rate, announced by the Federation of State Boards of Physical Therapy, bested the national average by 12 percentage points and was nearly 13 percentage points higher than the program's 2021 rate, bringing a wide smile to the face of Dr. Karen Friel, the program's director.

Friel believes that integrating clinical education early so that students get first-hand experience to solidify the concepts they're taught in the classroom is one key to the rising pass rate. She said her department embarked on a four-phase curricular change beginning in 2020, with 2022 grads experiencing the first phase. "The primary change for that cohort was the implementation of our ICE program," Friel says. ICE stands for integrated clinical education, which at Wingate has taken the form of a pro bono clinic called Wingate Rehabilitation and Performance, or WRAP for short.

The clinic is open every Monday afternoon during the semester to referred patients, most of whom are uninsured or underinsured. It's where first- and second-year students, under the supervision of their professors, do assessments and take patients through their range of treatments. Started in June of 2021, in its first six months the clinic logged 215 patient visits and provided services valued at more than \$24,000.

"Our students treat a multitude of different patients," Friel says.

She says the clinic enhances students' patient-interaction skills and their ability to put into action what they learn in the classroom. It also exposes them to a wider variety of patients than they would see during formal clinical rotations.

The class of 2022 also benefited from having classes realigned so that the material they were studying could be integrated into what they were experiencing in the clinic.

"We have a renewed focus on active learning so students can immediately apply what they learn," Friel says. "All of these factors combined, we believe, helped to contribute to the improvements in our NPTE pass rate."

It's been a stellar year for physical therapy at Wingate. One of 10 accredited physical therapy schools in North Carolina, Wingate's DPT program earned its 10-year accreditation from the Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education (CAPTE) last spring with no outstanding citations. Graduation from a CAPTE-accredited program is required before a physical therapist candidate can sit for the NPTE.

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