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Case 1: A New Arms Race?

It seems that each time North Korea sets off a nuclear explosion or launches another test rocket, President Donald Trump takes to Twitter to launch a volley of tweets belittling that country's leader Kim Jong-un or threatening a fiery end to his country. When the US Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson, has suggested negotiations to deescalate mounting tensions, he has been undercut by Trump who maintains that when it comes to North Korea, "there is only one thing that will work."

Although he won't say it, that "one thing" would appear to be war. Possibly, a nuclear war. North Korea and its leader have made clear their goal of developing a nuclear war capability including developing a missile capable of delivering a nuclear warhead to the United States.

While North Korea is busy insuring its place among the nuclear-armed nations of the world, it turns out the United States has been modernizing its own nuclear arsenal, adding yet more lethal and stealthy weapons to its inventory. It has been doing so ever since agreeing to a new arms reduction treaty with Russia in 2010. At the time, the Obama administration made a deal with Congress to revitalize the nation's aging nuclear arsenal in exchange for signing the accord. The price tag is estimated to be a trillion dollars over thirty years.

When the Trump administration took over in 2017, it wanted to spend even more—over a half billion more—with a large part of that increase going to speed up the development of an improved air-launched cruise missile designed to fly stealthily for thousands of miles and deliver a variable nuclear blast, from 5 to 150 kilotons. The intended target wouldn't see it coming and could experience destruction ranging from a fraction to ten times that delivered by the bomb the United States dropped on Hiroshima.

Do the latest upgrades to the US nuclear arsenal make it more likely they will be take action against its enemies, and, more specifically, North Korea? As President Trump told members of the United Nations General Assembly in September of 2017, "The United States has great strength and patience, but if it is forced to defend itself or its allies, we will have no choice but to totally destroy North Korea."

Case 2: A Perfect Solar Storm

Toward the end of spring, in 1859, the night skies as far south as Tahiti lit up with northern lights. Across the globe, people and animals awoke in the middle of the night and started their daily routines, mistakenly believing the day had begun. In some places, the sky turned so red that people thought the neighboring town was on fire. No one understood what was happening then, but we now know the Earth had undergone two successive solar storms, one on August 28 and the second on September 2. This is now known as “the Carrington Event.”

The Carrington Event was so-named for an amateur British astronomer, Richard Carrington, who, while observing sunspots on September 1, 1859, saw a brilliant solar flare burst from the side of the sun facing toward the earth. This event was accompanied by a coronal mass ejection (CME), a blast of plasma and electromagnetic field from the solar corona. CMEs are fairly common occurrences, but this one was exceptionally large, and it was aimed at Earth.

Besides causing spectacular celestial light-shows, CMEs produce electromagnetic fluctuations on Earth. In 1859, there was very little electrical infrastructure to be affected by such fluctuations. In fact, the telegraph system was almost all there was. The Carrington Event produced such large fluctuations in currents within that infrastructure that telegraph wires emitted sparks and started fires in telegraph offices and elsewhere. If such an electromagnetic blast were to happen now, it would destroy transformers, power grids, communication satellites, GPS, and the Internet. In other words, no Internet, no telephone, no cable, no electricity, no communication of any sort, no water, no lights, no food, no anything one couldn't grow or steal. It might take months or even years to restore power to many parts of the United States.

Solar disturbances, while individually as unpredictable as hurricanes, mostly occur during periods of intense solar activity that result when the sun reverses its magnetic field every eleven years. In 2012, at the peak of an eleven-year cycle, a solar storm occurred of equal or greater intensity as the Carrington Event, but we did not experience its full severity because Earth was not directly in its path. If the blast had occurred one week earlier, Earth would have taken a direct hit. In short, we dodged a bullet. The next period of high solar activity will be in 2023.

How vulnerable will we be by 2023? Computers and AI have advanced to the point where, at least for limited tasks, they can process information better, make better decisions, and act faster and more efficiently than humans. Self-driving cars, for instance, promise to become so safe that humans will be much better off not driving. Advances in other areas, too, such as surgery, welding, or investment will predictably relieve humans from such tasks. Thus, at least one breed of futurist predicts that we will turn over many of our basic skills to automation, and, by doing so, lose them when the next Carrington-type event strikes Earth.

Case 3: Big Problems for Big Pharma

The United States is facing an opioid epidemic. In 2015 alone, 33,000 people within the United States died from an opioid related death. Opioids are narcotics that produce a morphine-like effect. They work by binding to opioid receptors within the body and reducing the body's ability to send pain messages to the brain. Common opioids include hydrocodone, morphine, fentanyl, and oxycodone. Over half of the opioid-related deaths are linked to prescription opioid use, while the remaining are credited to street drugs. According to a study published in *Medical Care*, the prescription opioid epidemic has introduced a "total economic burden of \$78.5 billion."

In early June of 2017, nine counties in Tennessee sued Big Pharma (specifically Purdue Pharma, Mallinckrodt and Endo Pharmaceuticals) for costs of fighting the epidemic. The suit declares that Big Pharma should be labeled as drug dealers, and accuses pharmaceutical companies of misleading consumers as to the addictive properties of the drugs and marketing the drugs as the miracle cure for all types of pain. Two weeks later, the Missouri Attorney General filed a similar suit against three large pharmaceutical companies, Janssen, Purdue, and Endo Pharmaceuticals, claiming they are pushing a "campaign of fraud and deception." The Attorney General is asking for "hundreds of millions of dollars" in both damages and civil penalties. The pharmaceutical companies replied to the suits stating they share concerns regarding the opioid crisis and they have "acted appropriately, responsibly, and in the best interest of patients regarding our opioid pain medications."

These lawsuits are unique as up to this point legal initiatives have primarily put responsibility for the epidemic on physicians, prescribers, and pharmacies, not pharmaceutical companies. Some claim physicians are the first line of defense and are over-prescribing opioids for pain which may be effectively managed with other non-addictive medications such as Ibuprofen. On the flip side, opioids may be the best choices for some patients, especially those having surgical procedures. According to data collected in 2009 at Stanford University, 48 million people underwent inpatient surgery in the United States alone. It is likely that all of those persons were not only prescribed, but truly needed opioids to manage postoperative pain.

Case 4: Brain Reanimation

“Brain death” is a term used to describe the condition of persons who have fallen into an unresponsive coma. It is defined as an irreversible loss of all brain function including the brainstem. Characteristics include coma, absence of brainstem reflexes, and apnea. Persons considered to be brain dead are also determined to be legally and clinically dead with the death certificate reflecting the date in which brain death was declared, not the date patients are removed from life support. But what counts as an irreversible loss of brain function may soon change.

Dr. Ira Pastor, the CEO of Bioquark, a biomedical startup, has proposed brain reanimation (reversal of brain death) via the introduction of stem cells into the central nervous system in addition to other therapies such as nerve stimulation. Some doctors believe an injection of a proprietary peptide blend, BQ-A, into the clinically deceased person’s central nervous system will regrow neurons which had been damaged during trauma and/or death, facilitating repair and reanimation of the brain, technically, bringing the patient back to life. Dr. Pastor’s research is based on non-human species which have the ability to regenerate neurons, essentially repairing damage the organism sustained. Dr. Pastor believes the same processes can work in humans and he is committed to finding a way to do so.

Brain-dead patients are a primary source of donated organs (e.g., heart, liver, kidneys, lungs, pancreas, and small intestines) and tissue (e.g., corneas, skin, veins, heart valves, tendons, ligaments, and bones). A single donor is capable of saving up to eight lives via organ donation and can enhance the wellbeing and livelihood of up to one hundred people via tissue donation. According to the Organ Procurement and Transplant Network (part of the US Department of Health and Human Services), there are approximately 6,600 donors for the more than 117,000 persons on the organ donation waiting list. On average, ten people are added to the waiting list every day, and twenty-two people die each day waiting for a compatible organ.

Human reanimation trials have yet to start so there is no way of knowing if this novel treatment will actually work. Dr. Pastor has approval to conduct experimental trials in India on twenty brain-dead persons and is expecting to start the experiment within five years. Thus far, scientists have been unable to successfully revive a brain-dead patient. But being able to do so would be a major scientific breakthrough, save lives, and would surely bestow a great deal of attention and accolades to the researchers who made it happen.

Case 5: Death with Dignity

Charlie Gard, a child born in the UK in the fall of 2016, was diagnosed with an extremely rare genetic condition called mitochondrial DNA depletion syndrome. In this condition, the individual lacks the essential building blocks of DNA, depriving cells of energy and profoundly impairing normal growth and development. Parts of the body most affected are the muscles, liver, and brain. The condition left Charlie unable to move, see, hear, speak, cry, or swallow and dependent upon invasive life support.

The UK doctors wished to declare the child brain dead (i.e., clinically and legally dead) and remove him from life support. His parents refused and asked the European Court of Human Rights to grant them permission to bring Charlie to the United States where doctors at New York's Columbia University Medical Center offered to conduct an experimental treatment, nucleoside bypass therapy.

A High Court judge ruled against the trip to America stating the child should be able to "die with dignity." Charlie's parents appealed the decision declaring that the hospital was holding their child "prisoner" and that he was receiving "inhuman" care and treatment. Against the wishes of his parents, the UK High Court and other governing authorities ruled in opposition. Charlie was removed from life support in July 2017 and is now deceased.

Treatment for this condition is basically non-existent. The rarity of the disease means very few physicians are familiar with the condition or know of experimental interventions which may help the child. The US doctors stated the experimental treatment would have taken them into "uncharted territory."

Case 6: Foul Ball or Fair Play?

There's big money in college sports. A *New York Times* opinion piece from September 14, 2016, noted that in forty states, the highest paid public employee is a college coach. Yet, according to an article in the *Cincinnati Enquirer* of September 15, 2013, nearly all universities lose money on athletics and cover the shortfall through tuition and taxes. Schools direct to athletes resources that are not available to other students, siphoning money from academics and students' services. The Knight Commission reports that in 2010, Division I colleges with football teams spent seven times more on athletes than on other students, while Division I colleges without football teams spent three only times more on athletes than on other students.

Despite the resources designated for athletes, increasing concern is voiced about their exploitation. Many scholarship athletes come to college with dreams of a glorious college career, followed by a lucrative pro contract. Often these students are poorly prepared for the academic rigors of higher education, and their training and game schedules leave little time to study. The reality is that few are chosen by pro teams, and many leave college unprepared for careers.

One suggestion to address this concern is the creation of a college major in athletics, where students would earn a degree by training and playing. A second option would also include classes in sports-specific curricula that would prepare students for a career. Courses might include sports law, sports finance, broadcasting, team management, coaching, training, and public speaking. Another recommendation is to pay non-student athletes a professional salary and run athletics as a semi-pro revenue-producing side business that would provide the intangible value sports often bring to the college: pride, identity, and lifelong loyalty.

Some critics oppose a college major in athletics on the grounds that, in addition to failing the athletes who would graduate with limited marketable skills, this would undermine the fundamental purpose of higher education, and diminish the value of a college degree. Others are opposed to high tuition charged to non-athletes to support non-academic programs for athletes, or tax dollars used for sports entertainment already provided by pro teams.

Case 7: Gazing into an Abyss

When Sarah went out with friends the night before her mid-semester psychology of marketing exam, she took the usual selfies with her phone, and posted them on Facebook. She indicated where she was, and tagged various friends. The next morning, as soon as she woke up, she checked her iPhone for Facebook and Instagram notifications. She checked her various social media accounts surreptitiously during the early class to see what her friends were doing. All morning long she received push notifications when someone had liked one of her posts. These notifications appeared on the screen of her laptop while she was typing or reviewing notes for the test.

Jason was taking the same class as Sarah, and the two of them were studying with three others at a large table in the learning commons before the test. Jason had lost a lot of sleep the night before. He liked to argue about political issues and had gotten into a dispute with a friend of a friend on Facebook. This person, whom Jason didn't know, had posted some ridiculous meme that Jason felt obliged to challenge. After posting a comment, he kept checking back every few minutes to see if others on the thread had agreed with him. Instead of agreement, the discussion spiraled into more and more insulting personal attacks by total strangers against him and his friend. Even after he went to bed, he couldn't keep from going over the various comments in his head.

At the study table, Jason noticed how often Sarah closed her book and checked her smart phone. Sarah noticed Jason looking at his phone every time it dinged and shaking his head in disgust. At one point, he opened his laptop and started typing furiously. Soon, all five people at the table were engaged with one device or another. Suddenly, Sarah says, "Oh my gosh, it's time for class."

Books slammed, laptops closed, everything went into backpacks, and they all rushed to class. "I'm so not ready for this exam," Sarah said. "I thought I had plenty of time." Among other topics, the test would cover psychological techniques for stimulating and prolonging user engagement with websites.

Case 8: Grab That Mic!

By the time he parked his car, Joe's anger had reached the boiling point. While driving to his volunteer job as DJ at the local radio station, KMFN, he had been listening to Martha's Country Western music program on the same station. She often shared funny or personal musings online between pieces, but today Joe thought she had gone too far. She was using the community microphone to spout what could best be described as scientifically debunked misinformation from the anti-vaccination movement.

KMFN is a small FM radio station, broadcasting to the few thousand families in the township, but it also has a streaming website. It plays mostly music but also carries local community announcements about weather, road closings, and so forth. It has no news program. Everyone who works there is a volunteer, like Joe and Martha. The owners don't care about what DJs say between songs, as long as their programs offer the sort of content they've agreed on.

Martha bragged about defying her doctor and not vaccinating her children, and she challenged all her listeners to do the same. "Did you know that those vaccine companies pay for their own studies? Did you know that? And the government approves those drugs based on those very studies? How cozy is that arrangement? Doesn't it bother you that drug companies can't be sued if their products hurt you? Or that they don't even guarantee the safety of their vaccines? Why won't they guarantee them if they're so safe, huh?"

After a few more songs, Martha came back on the air, this time worked up over what she called "those nutty climate-change hoaxers." After listening to five minutes of Martha spouting climate-denier rhetoric, Joe had turned off the radio and sat in his car until he felt he could be civil. His own program was due to come on right after Martha's, so he went into the station and paced outside the soundroom until Martha's theme song came on and she stepped out.

Joe confronted her in the hallway. "Hey, that's not cool."

"What's not?"

"All that anti-vaccine BS. There's no science to support that, and if enough people stop vaccinating their kids, we could lose the herd immunity factor, and that would put a lot of people at risk. That's just totally irresponsible."

"Mind your own business," Martha said. "I can say anything I want. It's my program, and when I can see that Big Pharma and Big Brother are scamming all of us, I'm going to let my neighbors know about it."

Case 9: Jobs? What Jobs?

Jobs. Families depend on them. Economies thrive or decline based on their number and the salaries they pay. Political elections are contested and won on the basis of which candidate or political party will produce the most of them.

Alas, jobs are under attack on many fronts. Globalization and trade agreements have contributed to the flight of manufacturing to countries with the lowest labor costs. Automation and technology have eliminated many jobs while at the same time creating new ones, but there is not enough data to say for sure if that means there is a net gain or a net loss in jobs.

However, a study by Carl Frey and Michael Osborne, two professors at the University of Oxford, concluded that about 47 percent of total US employment is in danger of being eliminated by computerization. Self-driving cars could put taxi drivers out of work. The work of paralegals and researchers and many more could be wiped out by artificial intelligence.

For more and more workers, the future is looking less and less secure. A White House Study at the end of the Obama administration predicted that, because of automation, there would be fewer and fewer jobs and those jobs that remained would require more education and new skill sets.

In the book, *The Second Machine Age*, Andrew McAfee and Erik Brynjolfsson, professors at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, looked at the future of work in the age of intelligent machines. Their prediction: Massive unemployment and increasing income inequality. What's more, they do not believe that past remedies like government-funded job training or more education is going to be enough to correct the situation.

Case 10: No Comparison (Shopping)

In a world where online sellers can use cut-rate pricing to beat the brains out of brick-and-mortar retailers, Amazon is making moves to change the game once again in its favor. Contrary to Amazon's reputation, however, the end result this time may not be lower prices for consumers.

Amazon has no doubt lured away millions of shoppers from traditional stores by offering discounted prices via smartphone searches as shoppers check out merchandise in physical store aisles, a practice known as "window shopping." This practice most likely played a role in Amazon's inexorable climb to the top of the online heap. But, now that the Internet goliath is opening its own brick-and-mortar bookstores in a number of cities and acquiring 465 physical grocery stores in its takeover of Whole Foods, it has developed a tool to keep customers from using its in-store Wi Fi to comparison shop.

Amazon's patent, The Physical Store Online Shopping Control (US 9,665,881 B1), describes a system that can identify a customer's Internet-connected device (when it connects through the store's Wi Fi) and sense when the customer is trying to access a competitor's website. Once the system discovers such an attempt, it identifies what item the consumer is trying to access. It could then do one of several things: redirect the customer's browser to Amazon's own site or to an approved site; send marketing material to the customer; alert a sales person to approach the customer on the floor; or simply block access.

Of course, having a patent doesn't mean Amazon will actually use it. But if it did, the customer's only choice would be to not use the in-store provided Wi Fi service.

Case 11: Outrage Us

Theatre has examined and provoked political contention since at least the 6th century BCE. Thespis of Athens, a priest of Dionysus, was the first actor recorded as portraying another on stage. During one annual festival honoring the god, according to legend, Thespis stepped forward alone from the priestly chorus, and wearing the mask of Dionysus, spoke as the god himself. The audacity and blasphemy of this portrayal must surely have caused an uproar. Nonetheless, in 534 BCE, Athens held the first competition to select the best tragedy, and Thespis was declared the winner.

The philosopher and scholar, Allan Bloom, asserts that Shakespeare is profoundly political in his timeless examinations of power and leadership. Over the centuries, directors have often given Shakespeare's works contemporary treatment to reflect current political realities and provoke discourse on public concerns. Numerous theatres across the country staged *Julius Caesar*, following the 2016 presidential election.

In June 2017, a Shakespeare in the Park production by Manhattan's Public Theater portrayed Julius Caesar with characteristics suggestive of President Trump: lots of blond hair, overly-long ties, hand gestures identical to Trump's, a wife with a Slovenian accent, and a gold bathtub. Breaking with long-standing tradition, the *New York Times* reviewed the play before it opened, resulting in outraged protesters at the first show, who claimed the production encouraged assassination of the president. Director Oskar Eustis accused the newspaper of inciting hatred, but the *Times* defended its decision as responding to a developing controversy. Bowing to the protests, Delta Airlines and Bank of America withdrew their sponsorship from Public Theater.

Public Theater had staged the play in 2012, portraying Julius Caesar with characteristics suggestive of President Obama, with no protests.

The New York Times reported on June 12 that Donald Trump, Jr. tweeted, "I wonder how much of this 'art' is funded by taxpayers? Serious question, when does 'art' become political speech & does that change things?"

Case 12: Space Junk

Most people agree that pollution and littering are bad for a variety of reasons. Pollution poisons the water and the air, killing or injuring many species of animals and plants. Some toxic chemicals leach into the soil and may even affect aquifers. Some airborne chemicals affect the ozone layer. Plastic waste may be ingested by animals or may entangle them as in a trap. The list of harms to the environment or to sensitive ecosystems goes on and on. However, pollution is a common byproduct of manufacturing and is sometimes quite costly to prevent, while we humans seem to shed trash everywhere we go.

We are now seriously contemplating the prospect of colonizing space and other planets. A number of entrepreneurs, including Sir Richard Branson, Jeff Bezos, and Elon Musk are pushing technology toward space flight, space tourism, and ultimately space colonization. Governments, too, are pouring resources into their space programs. NASA hopes to send astronauts to Mars around 2035, and China plans to have its own orbiting space station and lunar colony about the same time.

A predictable consequence of humans going into space is that we will take our pollution and litter with us. Free-floating space litter presents a serious threat to most spacecraft. Small debris can act the same as small meteorites by puncturing the skins of spacecraft or space suits. Large debris can collide with spacecraft with catastrophic results or can tumble to Earth. There are in fact many abandoned space vehicles still in orbit or drifting out of orbit.

Such “space junk” is dangerous mostly because floating litter doesn’t stay put. But what about litter left on the surface of extraterrestrial planets? We have already littered the surfaces of the Moon and of Mars with abandoned equipment, but, one might reason, a handful of spaceship parts will not do great damage to an entire planet. For that matter, neither would billions of tons of trash, since the Moon—and Mars for all we know—are dead planets with no ecosystem to damage. There are no plants or animals to poison, no water to pollute, no breathable atmosphere. In fact, if an economical mode of transportation were to be invented, the moon might serve as a perfect place to dump dangerous chemical or nuclear waste.

Case 13: Title IX or CYA?

When Title IX legislation took effect in 1972, many decried the inevitable diminishment of men's sports and the "punishing" of male athletes who had done nothing wrong, but who would now lose coveted athletic scholarships. When the clarification of the scope of Title IX was released in 2011, in the form of a "Dear Colleague Letter" from the Department of Education (DoE), some feared that the federal government had gone too far in attempting to address so-called campus rape culture. They worried that the letter would lead to a new and frightening era in which college men would be falsely accused of rape. Defenders of Title IX say the legislation addresses long-standing practices that unfairly deny opportunities to women and also addresses campus cultures in which rapes are common and perpetrators seldom punished.

The 2011 Dear Colleague Letter required all schools receiving federal funding to specify a Title IX coordinator, preferably one without a conflict of interest. However, to avoid lawsuits from those who have been sanctioned or expelled, and to avoid appearing on the DoE's list of schools with federal Title IX complaints, many colleges and universities have chosen to house their Title IX coordinator within their legal office. Some schools have even hired attorneys specifically to act as their Title IX coordinators. Critics of this practice note that a school's attorney is responsible for protecting the interests of the school. Those interests may not always include equitable treatment for victims and survivors or gender equity.

Case 14: Transition Move

Over 4,000 Texas high school girls are wrestlers, according to the National Wrestling Coaches Association. Texas is one of six states that host girls' state wrestling competitions, whereas (as of May 2017) thirty-nine states don't have separate tournaments for boys and girls but allow girls to wrestle against boys at state competitions. Texas state law, however, prohibits girls from wrestling on boys' teams. Texas University Interscholastic League (UIL) governs Texas athletic competitions, including wrestling, and, by UIL regulations, gender is determined by the athlete's birth certificate.

Born female, Mack Beggs began using testosterone in 2015 to transition from female to male. He wanted to wrestle as a boy, but could not because his birth certificate identified him as female. UIL rules allow the use of testosterone only when prescribed by a physician. After reviewing Mack's medical records, the UIL granted a medical exemption for the use of testosterone, but told him that if he wanted to wrestle, he must compete as a girl. Beggs requested to compete as a boy; the parents of some competitors claimed that testosterone gave him an unfair advantage over their daughters; and a lawsuit was filed, alleging that his opponents were at an increased risk of injury. Nevertheless, the UIL stood by its decision that Beggs must compete as a girl. Under pressure from parents, some potential opponents forfeited rather than wrestle against Beggs at the 2017 regionals. When he won the 2017 Texas High School Girls Wrestling Champion, his victory was both cheered and jeered.

Some criticize the UIL for inflexibly basing their decision on the birth certificate. Others criticize the UIL's lenience in allowing Beggs to compete at all while using testosterone. Some parents and teachers express anger at being forced to confront children's questions about gender identity. Others fault the state for creating an untenable situation for transgender students. Beggs is faulted by some for agreeing to compete with an unfair advantage. His supporters, however, claim that he was an excellent wrestler before starting testosterone, and that those who claim he has an unfair advantage are discounting his years of commitment and focused hard work. Some support his right to participate in activities available to all other students. Others claimed this right is not justified, as it is at the expense of the rights of every one of his opponents.

Case 15: Voters: Pay or Penalize

In the 2016 US Presidential election, 55.7 percent of Americans eighteen years or older exercised their civic duty by voting. That percentage puts the United States in the bottom third of the world's developed countries in terms of participation by eligible voters.

In off-year or mid-term elections, the turnout is even lower. In primary races, the turnout rates drop into single digits, accounting perhaps for the shift to more polarized and polarizing candidates.

Opinion pieces in many newspaper editorial pages have lamented the lack of voter participation and offered suggestions of what to do about it. Eight states currently register citizens on their 18th birthday unless they decline. Other states are considering ways to make registering easier. Some even allow voters to register when they go to vote. Some allow voters to go to any polling place in their jurisdiction on election day not just to the ones where they are registered.

No state has yet made voting mandatory. For that matter, neither has the US government. However, Australia and Belgium, two nations that lead the world in voter participation, require voters to exercise their civic duty at the polls. Australia even goes so far as to collect a \$20 penalty from those who don't.

Yale Law professor Stephen J. Carter has made a contrasting proposal: Pay citizens to vote. Perhaps that would help encourage more young people, minorities, and lower income voters to go to the polls.