Given that Halloween is tomorrow, here’s a frighting story– the tale of what a Trump victory would mean for the future climate. Would a Trump victory be the end of the world? That might be an overstatement. But the result would surely be a surge in carbon emissions, dooming us to even more severe climate change.

The federal government has gotten a late start in cutting US emissions anyway, due to Republican resistance. If we fall further behind, we could blow past any chance of meeting our climate targets. And Trump would also, no doubt, do his best to prevent climate action in other countries.

On Trump’s list of “Day One” actions would certainly be a repeal of all of Biden’s executive orders relating to climate or environmental justice and an announcement that the U.S. will once again withdraw from the Paris Agreement. Trump’s vision is essentially to make the U.S. into a petro-state like Saudi Arabia, viewing fossil fuels as the key to national wealth. In September, he pledged tobuild “hundreds” of new fossil-fuel-fired power plants.

Trump would also begin the process of rolling back all the new regulations that have come out of the Biden EPA. We would also expect Trump to slow walk all the grant funding provided by the Inflation Reduction Act. And of course, he would flood the federal courts with more ultra-conservative judges.

Trump continues to loathe renewable energy, in particular wind. “Right now we have energy that’s weak, substandard and unaffordable,” Trump said in announcing his energy plan. “It’s made by the wind. The windmills rust. They rot. They kill the birds. It’s the most expensive energy there is.” Trump has also vowed to end the “madness” of Biden’s effort to promote electric vehicles.

Trump would no doubt like to repeal the IRA entirely, thereby getting rid of not only the grant funding but also tax credits for clean energy. If the Republicans have the political will to do so and they control Congress, they could do this the same way the Democrats enacted the IRA: the reconciliation procedure, which avoids a possible filibuster. Since the IRA has produced economic benefits in Red states, there might be some congressional resistance to outright repeal. Still, I think we might expect to see a partial rollback of this signature climate law. Finally, we would undoubtedly see efforts to block state climate actions and a ramped up Republican war against investment companies and other corporations that have become more climate conscious.

All of these possibilities fall within what might be considered “normal” political behavior. There are indications that Trump might be more aggressive in a second term. Some conservatives have plans to fire thousands of top civil servants and substitute MAGA replacements. That could cripple any effort by a future president to be resume climate action. Trump might also attempt to fire the Democrats serving in independent agencies, something conservatives have long claimed would be constitutional.

In his first term, Trump also sought massive budget cuts that would gut EPA and other federal agencies. Congressional Republicans didn’t back him then, but the Freedom Caucus types have gained a lot more power in the party since then. A Republican Congress probably wouldn’t support cutting budgets by a third or more and eliminating some programs entirely. But even cuts of 10% could be crippling for agencies that are already stretched thin.

All of this is speculative. On the one hand, if the Democrats manage to retake the House or keep the Senate (somewhat less likely), that would hamper Trump in some ways. The Supreme Court might dig in its heels at some of Trump’s efforts, as I discussed in a previous post. On the other hand, a Trump presidency could be politically destabilizing in ways that are hard to predict, leading to more profound damage to our governance system.

Trump is still the frontrunner with a very real chance of beating Biden in a head-to-head contest. Don’t kid yourself about the consequences. Even in the best case scenarios, a Trump victory would be a big blow to global climate actions. Frankly, our chances of keeping emissions under control could slip through our hands. At that point, we would need to think a lot more seriously about geo-engineering as a strategy of last resort.