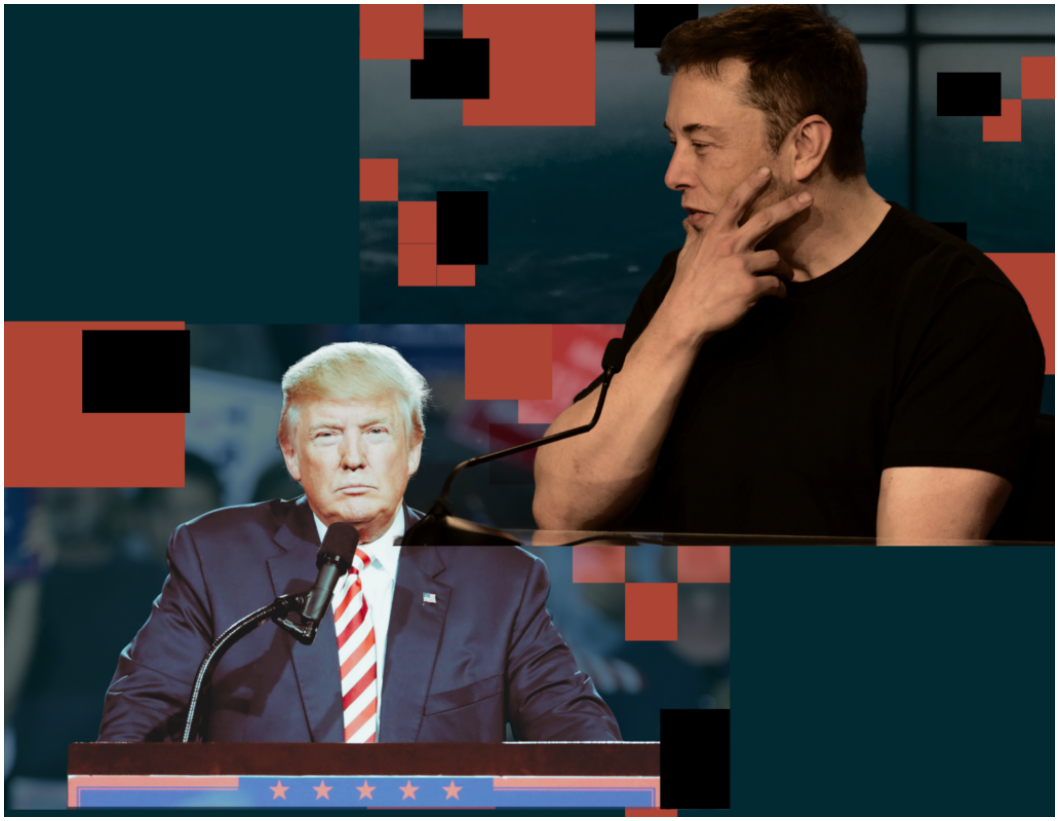

Our chances of helping avoid the most catastrophic climate disruptions just dimmed dramatically. Donald Trump's victory and self-declared mandate means a lot of things—among them, that crucial climate and environmental policies are threatened like never before.

There will be plenty to say in coming days about what this means for America's role in the world and the policy successes of the Biden-Harris administration. For now, I want to dwell on one dude: Elon Musk, the techy totem to Trumpism.

The world's "richest man" bet on, campaigned for—even ran get-out-the-vote operations for—Trump in the swing state where energy policy became a hot button issue (Pennsylvania) and he helped him win. Musk single-handedly gave almost $120 million to the Trump campaign as well as untold amounts of free media on X. It's relevant for the months ahead that Musk took over the San Francisco-based Twitter, gutted the staff, and dismantled the disinformation guardrails. Now we're looking at the very real possibility of Musk serving as some sort of "government efficiency czar" overseeing regulatory rollbacks. Musk's mom was asked about this on Fox News recently and said he could slash spending for a Trump administration.

“He’s going to just get rid of people who are not working or don’t have a job or not doing a job well, just like he did on Twitter.”

The civil service is not Twitter. But that doesn’t mean Musk and Trump won’t try to follow that same playbook for the federal government. In fact, there is an even more elaborate playbook waiting for them. As Ann Carlson has written at length, Project 2025 includes a proposal to give the President the power, through “Schedule F,” to convert as many as 50,000 jobs in the federal government from career positions to political ones. The EPA is a particular concern.

The hypocrisy of Elon Musk is rich.

“The only thing stopping the California government and overbearing regulatory agencies from being even worse is that people and companies can move out of state,” Musk tweeted recently. “If the machine behind the Kamala puppet wins this election, the whole country will be far worse than California is today.”

It’s rich because the Tesla and SpaceX CEO has arguably benefited more from California’s climate policies than any other individual in the country, and yet he now assails regulations, especially California’s innovative climate policies.

Let’s be clear, Tesla exists in large part because of the California Air Resources Board and California’s visionary environmental regulations. In 1990, CARB adopted a mandate to require 2 percent of new cars sold in California be emission-free by 1998. That first move would be hailed as a bold “jump start” of the EV market even though it struggled for years to take off. Then in 2004, CARB enacted the world’s first greenhouse gas emission reduction standards for motor vehicles. The Low Carbon Fuel Standard is another one of California’s policy innovations, established as a result of the 2006 law AB 32. The LCFS program has helped reduce the carbon intensity of California’s transportation fuels by over 15% and displace petroleum fuels. One thing LCFS has undeniably accomplished is helping build EV demand and charging infrastructure, with Elon Musk’s Tesla benefiting the most. “The LCFS program is fundamental to California’s efforts to decarbonize transportation,” wrote several automakers—including Tesla—in a recent letter.

Ezra Klein recently pointed out that electric cars took off because of subsidies upon subsidies meant to level the playing field for electric cars when it was necessarily more expensive to build them. “I think we would’ve gotten there anyway,” replied his podcast guest, former GOP presidential contender Vivek Ramaswamy. That’s

wishful thinking at best.

Tesla received more than $3.2 billion in state subsidies from 2009-2022. That is an estimate of direct incentives and credit sales tallied by Gov. Gavin Newsom's office, Politico reports. "Our exponential growth has been made possible by the hard work of the Tesla team, the loyalty of our customers and climate policy leadership in California," a Tesla blog post said in January 2023.

This is the same Musk who has fully traded in his clean tech credentials to throw in his lot with oil and gas interests who gave $75 million to get Trump back in the White House where they hope he will erase strict methane rules and institute a new 'drill baby drill' approach to energy policy. Not only that but the billionaire CEO of coal mining company Alliance Resource Partners was one of the top donors to Musk's America PAC, according to campaign finance disclosures reported on last week by HEATED. Trump campaigned on climate denialism, unleashed oil and gas pollution, and a wholesale rollback of clean energy subsidies. On the campaign trail, Trump bashed electric vehicles, solar power, and windmills, threatening to cancel EV policies on Day One. Now, the CEO of America's most successful EV manufacturer has helped a climate-denying convicted felon win re-election at a crucial time in the climate crisis, all while being rewarded with a surge in Tesla stock.

The only good thing about calling out this kind of dangerous hypocrisy is that it's motivating. And motivation is something we're going to need a lot of.