Ignoring all the warning signs

In his preface to his massive history, *The Second World War*, Winston Churchill wrote in 1948:

One day President Roosevelt told me that he was asking publically for suggestions about what the war should be called.

I said at once “The Unnecessary War.” There was never a war more easy to stop than that which has just wrecked what was left of the world from the previous struggle (First World War).

As Churchill documents in the first volume of his history, there were numerous opportunities for England and France to stop Hitler while his military machine was still weak: the military occupation of the Rhineland in 1936, the annexation of Austria in March 1938 and the Sudetenland in October 1938, followed by the occupation of all Czechoslovakia in March 1939. Britain did nothing, not wanting to provoke Hitler.

Churchill recounts how Ralph Wigram of the British Foreign Office, who had been secretly providing Churchill with information about the German military buildup, despaired when Hitler occupied the Rhineland.

“War is now inevitable,” Wigram told his wife, “and it will be the most terrible war there has ever been. I don’t think I shall see it, but you will. Wait now for bombs on this little house.” (It was indeed bombed.) “I have failed to make the people here realize what is at stake. I am not strong enough, I suppose.”

Wigram took his own life in December 1936.

The story reminds me of the suicide last year of Martin Weitzman, the environmental economist who became depressed about his diminishing capacity to influence public policy.

Weitzman had written a book discussing the “worst case” scenario of climate change:

“One thing we know for sure,” he wrote, “is that a greater than 10 percent chance of the earth’s eventual warming of 11 degrees Fahrenheit or more — the end of the human adventure on the planet as we know it — is too high.

“And that’s the path the planet is on at the moment.”

“Most everything we know tells us that climate change is bad,” he continued. “Most everything we don’t know tells us it’s probably much worse.”

On Tuesday, I catalogued numerous indicators that climate change is upon us: record wildfires on the West Coast, melting ice sheets, loss of tropical forests and thawing permafrost.

Donald Trump sneers at climate change and has done all he can to make things worse. Nothing is more vital than the replacement of this anti-science president in November.