New Power Plants (by Fuel)

This revealing graph from Wonkblog has some important lessons. First, power plants last a long time. Most of the generation fleet is twenty to sixty years old.

Second, at this point, coal is basically a legacy fuel. It exists because it pays to keep old plants open. They are grandfathered and don't have to use state-of-the-art pollution control. New coal plants, however, have not been appealing because of the pollution control requirements.

The era of coal-fired power may be coming to an end in the United States, at least if present trends continue. As another chart shows, the current coal fleet is beginning to erode at the same time that construction of new coal plants has virtually ceased:

Disappearing Coal Plants

If U.S. coal-fired electricity generation is on its last legs, efforts to keep it alive by softening regulations — a major effort in the GOP House — may only be postponing the inevitable. Of course, predictions are hazardous, but current trends do not seem favorable to King Coal.