In the 2016 election, Trump pledged to save coal. Since then, his Administration has pulled out all the stops in this effort, including repeal of dozens of environmental regulations. All for naught. In 2021, U.S. coal use will be 30% below what it is when Trump took office.

Coal's immediate situation is even worse, due to the coronavirus (which, of course, Trump has done little to halt). The Energy Information Agency says that U.S. coal use will be down 26% in 2020, compared with 2019. The main reason for the fall is that energy use is down in 2020. Coal bore the brunt of that. The EIA predicts a partial rebound for coal in 2021, but still well below 2019 levels.

During 2020, the reduction in coal has been offset by a 9% increase in natural gas and a 5% increase in renewables. (The EIA only includes utility scale renewables, not roof top solar. So this underestimates the actual increase in renewables.) The switch from coal to gas has been especially pronounced in MISO and PJM areas (roughly Iowa to Maryland), where price competition is especially tough.

What's happened in Texas is an important part of the story. Texas is the closest the U.S. comes to completely competitive power markets. It's also the oil and gas capital of the U.S. And of course, the state government is pretty much indifferent to environmental concerns. Yet in Texas, the decline in coal use has resulted in more reliance on renewables, not natural gas.

In public health terms, the shift to gas and renewables is an unalloyed benefit. Coal is by far the worst of the major fuels in its health effects due to its high levels of dangerous particulates. Thousands of lives have been saved by the decline of coal since 2016. No thanks to the current President, of course.