Under Trump, it's been a mixed picture, with progress except in two states.

What were Midwestern states doing during the four years Trump was busy promoting fossil fuels? States with Democratic governors are making progress. Of the three states under unified Republican control, two are trying to prop up coal. Ohio has decreased support for clean energy and provided generous subsidies to coal, while Indiana is trying to slow the process of closing coal generators. The third solidly Republican state, Iowa, leads the nation in the share of its power produced by wind.

I realize that people have different views about what's part of the Midwest. Westerners think it ends closer to them, after Nebraska. New Yorkers may think it begins just beyond Philadelphia or even New Jersey. As someone who grew up in Illinois, I think of the Midwest as the area from Ohio to Iowa. (Missouri had slaves, making it a southern state from my perspective; Pennsylvania is eastern or mid-Atlantic.) Here's a rundown on each state.

Illinois

Illinois now depends on nuclear power for almost half its energy and wind for almost a fifth, bringing it up to almost two-thirds zero carbon energy. Coal provides about a quarter of its power and natural gas 10%. In 2018, state regulators approved a mandate that 25% of all power come from renewables by 2025. Illinois's efforts to keep its nuclear plants running has encountered resistance from federal regulators, and there are conflicting bills in the state legislature on how to respond. The Governor is calling for carbon pricing as a solution, an approach that seems likely to win approval at the federal level.

Indiana

Where Illinois relies heavily on zero-carbon energy sources, Indiana resolutely clings to fossil fuels. Three-fourths of its power comes from coal, and almost another fifth from natural gas, leaving only a paltry five percent from renewable energy. In tune with Trump's agenda, a 2020 law slows down the process of shuttering coal-fired plants, requiring three years' notice to regulators. Nevertheless, coal is under pressure. State regulators are investigating the use of coal plants based on evidence that the utilities are sometimes running the plants even when the power costs more than it is worth. Indiana did set a non-binding renewables target of 10% by 2025. In the meantime, utilities are increasingly disenchanted with coal.

Northern Indiana Public Service Co. (NIPSCO) found that it could "save customers more than $4 billion over 30 years by moving from 65% coal today to 15% coal in 2023 and eliminating the resource by 2028."

Iowa

In 2019, Iowa got 42% of its power from wind, the highest share of any state. Coal was down to 35%, half of what it had been a decade earlier. The remainder was a mix of natural gas and nuclear. Iowa could easily produce more renewable energy but needs ways to get that energy to users. The solution would probably require building new transmission lines, a politically difficult task.

Michigan

Compared with Indiana, Michigan is a bit less reliant on fossil fuels, getting 40% of its power from coal and 23% from natural gas. The remainder is mostly nuclear (28%), while renewables are under 8%. A small amount of power comes from high polluting oil-burning generators. Michigan has a renewable portfolio standard with a goal of 15% renewable energy for 2021. State law sets a goal that 35% of the state's electrical needs must come through a combination of efficiency measures and renewable energy by 2025. As in Indiana, utilities are ahead of the state government. Consumer Energy plans to cut carbon emissions by 90% from 2005 levels by 2050, mostly via expanding use of solar, with an interim target of 50% by 2030.

Minnesota

Minnesota gets half its power from fossil fuels — 40% coal and 11% natural gas. The other half is split roughly evenly between nuclear and renewables. Minnesota Power will achieve 50% renewable energy in 2021 . The state has a new transmission line from a Canadian hydropower producer, which will take it to 50% zero carbon energy in 2021. Xcel (the state's largest utility) announced goals to reach 100% carbon-free electricity by 2050, with a benchmark goal of 80% below 2005 levels by 2030. It plans to spend $3 billion on clean energy as part of the COVID economic recovery. In 2019, the governor announced a proposal for 100% clean energy by 2050.

Ohio.

Ohio is even more reliant on fossil fuels than Indiana, with 43% natural gas and 30% coal. In 2019, the state enacted House Bill 6, which rolled back renewable energy and energy efficiency standards and provides huge subsidies for coal and nuclear power plants. In July 2020, federal prosecutors charged Ohio's Speaker of the House Larry Householder with accepting $61M in bribes to pass the bill. There's now litigation over whether the utility that allegedly paid the bribe is entitled to the billion dollar subsidy in the bill. On more positive notes, Cincinnati is planning to build the country's largest municipal solar project, and the state utility commission gave a green light to an offshore wind project in Lake Erie.

Wisconsin

Wisconsin gets half its power from coal and 20% from natural gas, with about 27% from nuclear and 8% renewables accounting for the remainder. Wisconsin's governor signed an executive order in 2019 committing the state to 100% carbon free energy by 2050. The state's utilities seem to be on-board with this goal.