

DIVE AWARDS

Innovator of the Year: Lon Huber, Navigant

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Lon Huber

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“Success in general is a policy that benefits all ratepayers in the long run”

Jumpstart to working in utility space:

Working for Rep. Gabbie Giffords, D-Ariz., in 2009, Huber was a solar policy fellow for the U.S. House of Representatives.

Career bucketlist?

Huber has yet to work within a utility, outside a consulting role.

Next big thing:

Huber anticipates a lot of utility buzz around his subscription price formation proposal.

Navigant’s energy director has been pushing the envelope on rate design for the grid of the future. Lon Huber’s fingerprints are found on a lot of the modern energy rates and plans for state mandates, particularly through his work as former director of the government and utility practice at Strategen Consulting and former staffer at the Arizona Residential Utility Consumer Office.

The policy packages and concepts he has worked on have been picked up by regulators, state legislators and utilities from Arizona, to Hawaii, to the Northeast.

In December 2016, Huber co-authored a white paper describing an alternative framework for Renewable Portfolio Standards (RPS), on behalf of the Arizona's Residential Utility Consumer Office. His "Clean Peak Standard" (CPS) sought to better align state procurement goals for zero-emissions energy resources with the existing grid needs of electric power system operators. The concept seeks to put a value on solar-plus-storage and other emerging load-serving technologies, to add time-based incentive payments for renewable power.

While Arizona's CPS docket was put on hold and reintroduced this year by Commissioner Andy Tobin, the concept began making waves. California Democratic Gov. Jerry Brown signed a bill in October, 2017, building off the proposal and directing utilities to plan carbon-free alternatives to meet peak demand. In addition to California, Massachusetts passed a bill adding CPS to the state's mandates, giving regulators the leeway to determine the specifics.

"Massachusetts might go a very different direction maybe than I originally outlined in the white paper but as long as it still hits those main objectives, I'd consider that a success for sure," Huber told Utility Dive.

New York regulators are also considering CPS to address the capacity needs of supply-constrained areas.

The CPS "opens up new opportunities to address today's greatest energy challenges like enhancing reliability and resiliency on the power grid and meeting peak energy demand without the need for new fossil generation," Kate McKeever, Enel Green Power director of regulatory affairs, told Utility Dive.

Huber's latest concept is a subscription pricing framework, put forward by Navigant, for utilities to give their customers precisely what they want. He anticipates seeing a utility file a similar proposal soon, sayin several utilities including Tucson Electric Power (TEP) have shown interest in the concept. The idea, which Huber developed with TEP, draws on the success of Netflix and Amazon-style subscription memberships, and would allow customers to select fixed monthly prices for different levels of utility-provided products and services.

Huber also designed a community solar program in Hawaii and worked to propose demand rates as part of net energy metering reform.

States	Huber's contributions, legislative/regulatory actions related to Huber's work
Arizona	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negotiated all-source request for proposal (RFP) for Arizona Public Service (APS), leading to the large solar-plus-storage First Solar deal • Wrote a whitepaper on the Clean Peak Standard, which became the basis for a proposal by Commissioner Andy Tobin, currently in the rulemaking phase • Contributed to pilot design for utility-owned distributed solar programs for APS and Tucson Electric Power; both advanced past pilot stage, setting the ground for similar solar-plus-storage pilots
California	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pacific Gas & Electric and other utilities started to issue all-source RFPs, similar to design in Arizona • Gov. Jerry Brown signed into law a version of the Clean Peak Standard.
Connecticut	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policymakers adopted "buy all, sell all" component
Hawaii	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed a community solar and solar-plus-storage program for the Public Utilities Commission
Maine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regulators adopted "buy all, sell all" component of rate design proposal put forth by Huber
Maryland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contributed to development of community solar policy • Consulted on grid modernization topics through the Maryland Office of People's Counsel
Massachusetts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State adopted a Clean Peak Standard proposal, leaving the Department of Energy Resources (DOER) to establish details • Wrote report on energy storage potential for DOER and the state's Clean Energy Center • Regulators adopted similar distributed energy resources (DER) concepts in the Solar Massachusetts Renewable Target program, similar to Huber's
Minnesota	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Currently working on default time-of-use rate design for Minnesota Power • Consulted Xcel Energy and created a TOU rate design pilot for Xcel Minnesota
New Hampshire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participated in net energy metering design proceeding • Regulators are considering utility-owned distributed assets like solar-plus-storage, which Huber helped get off the ground in Arizona, as part of broader New Hampshire rulemaking for DERs
New York	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authored key energy storage reports • Participated in the state's Value of Distributed Energy Resources tariff proceeding • The state is considering a variation on the Clean Peak Standard

Not all his concepts have taken off as rapidly. During a contentious time for net energy metering policies, he proposed a way forward for utilities. Around 2015, he put forth a concept of utility-owned distributed solar while at Strategen.

TEP and APS went ahead and took their rooftop solar-owned programs beyond piloting. “I thought there would be more in other states to follow,” Hubert said. However, he’s waiting to see if adding utility-owned residential storage into the mix will build more interest.

In Maine, Huber helped put together a legislative package, which Gov. Paul LePage, R, vetoed in spite of support from utilities. However, state regulators picked up a portion of the proposal, the “buy-all, sell-all” program, which came from the same concept he had put forward. Maine’s rate for the program was “lower than I would have done it,” Huber said, but he remains focused on the overall success of his concepts.

The end policies and regulations implemented may not be mirror-images of their original proposals, but they get at the heart of addressing a modern lower-emissions grid implementing DERs.

“Really, my definition of success is when the policy has been either through the legislature or the commission, passed or codified, in a way that still hits at the original intent of the policy,” he said. “Usually it’s always revolving around benefits to all ratepayers, not just [DER] participants.”