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INSIDE

Page 1 - The 2026 Pivot: Load, Logistics, and the Hill

Page 4 - HCI Board Leadership Transition

Page 5 - Joint Action Agency Meeting

Page 7 - 2026 HCI Annual Gathering

Page 8 - HCI Owner VPPSA's Grace Sawyer

Page 9 - HCI Welcomes a New Partner, Quanam

Page 10 - Upcoming Conferences

Page 11 - HCI Blog

The 2026 Pivot: Load, Logistics, and the Hill

In our last newsletter, HCI discussed the operational "squeeze" facing public power. Since then, the industry landscape has sharpened. As we prepare for the APPA Legislative Rally in Washington D.C. later this month, we are seeing a convergence of three critical trends: a verified surge in industrial load, a shifting regulatory environment for generation of electricity, and new clarity on tax incentives. Here are the issues defining the public power agenda for February 2026.

1. The "Firm Power" Reality Check

For the last two years, data center growth was a projection. In early 2026, it is an operational reality. New industry analysis confirms that data center electricity consumption is on track to double from 2022 levels by this year, creating a "demand shock" not seen in decades ("Understanding Grid Modernization").

- **The Issue:** It is no longer just about "clean" energy; it is about "firm" energy. The retirement of baseload generation is colliding with this 24/7 load growth.
- **The Trend:** We are seeing a distinct pivot in capital allocation. According to recent market outlooks, deal activity is shifting back toward conventional generation and grid-reliability assets (gas and transmission) to support this load, as renewable interconnection queues remain clogged (PwC).

- **For Our Members:** Expect industrial customers to ask harder questions about *reliability* and *capacity* than they have in ten years. The "economic development" conversation is now a "power availability" conversation.

2. Regulatory Whiplash: The GHG Rule Reconsideration

The regulatory ground is moving under our feet. Following the Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) finalization of the power plant greenhouse gas (GHG) standards in 2024, the political shifts in 2025 have introduced significant uncertainty.

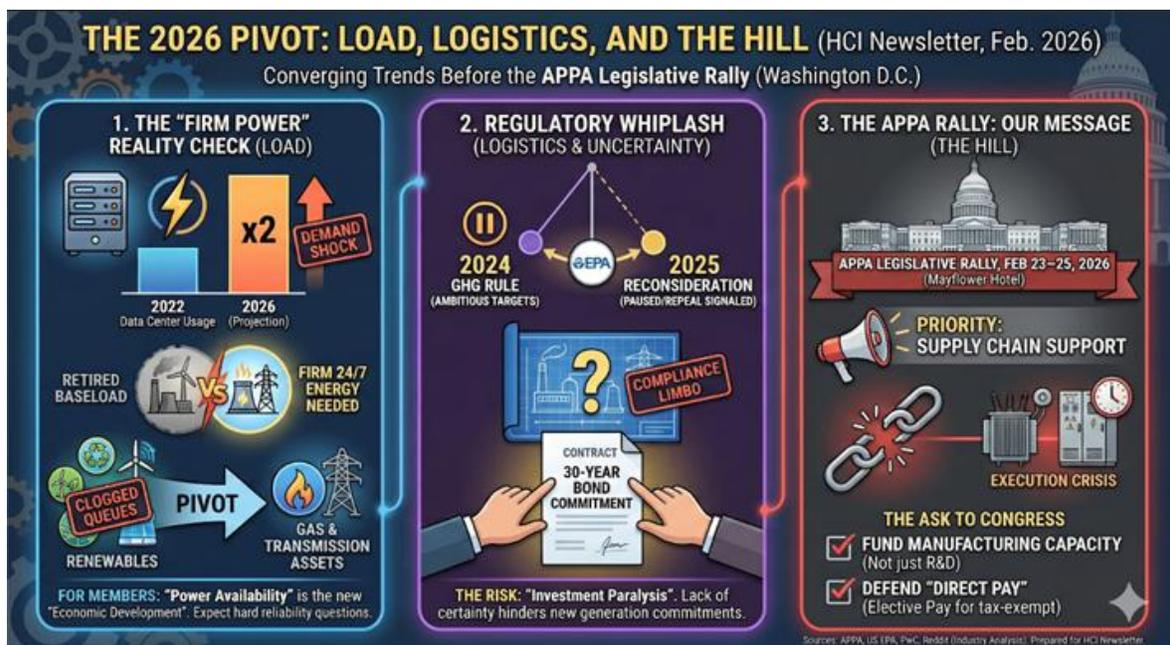
- **The Status:** While the 2024 rule set ambitious capture targets for gas and coal, the "reconsideration" processes initiated by the new EPA leadership have paused or signaled the repeal of key provisions (US EPA).
- **The Risk:** While this may sound like relief for fossil-fuel assets, it creates investment paralysis. Without regulatory certainty, it is difficult for Joint Action Agencies to commit to the 30-year bond issuances needed for new generation. We are operating in a "compliance limbo" that we must address with policymakers.

3. The APPA Legislative Rally: Our Message

We are just a few weeks away from the American Public Power Association (APPA) Legislative Rally, taking place February 23–25, 2026, in Washington, D.C.

- **The Priority:** Our primary message to Congress must be Supply Chain Support. The "execution crisis" the inability to get transformers and switchgear in a reasonable timeframe—is the single biggest threat to meeting the load growth mentioned above.
- **The Ask:** We need to ensure that federal funding (like the DOE’s efficiency rebates and grid resilience grants) is flowing to manufacturing capacity, not just R&D. We also need to defend the "Direct Pay" (Elective Pay) provisions of the tax code, which level the playing field for our tax-exempt members to build owned assets.

If you plan to attend the APPA Rally at the Mayflower Hotel on the 23rd, let’s make sure Public Power is heard loud and clear.



Resources:

- "APPA Legislative Rally." *American Public Power Association*, 2026, www.publicpower.org/event/legislative-rally.
- "Greenhouse Gas Standards and Guidelines for Fossil Fuel-Fired Power Plants." *US Environmental Protection Agency*, 12 Mar. 2025, www.epa.gov/stationary-sources-air-pollution/greenhouse-gas-standards-and-guidelines-fossil-fuel-fired-power.
- "Power and Utilities: US Deals 2026 Outlook." *PwC*, 16 Dec. 2025, www.pwc.com/us/en/industries/energy-utilities-resources/library/power-utilities-deals-outlook.html.
- "Understanding Grid Modernization: The Biggest Market Trend of 2026." *Reddit*, 14 Jan. 2026, www.reddit.com/r/AsymmetricAlpha/comments/1qc8n2l/understanding_grid_modernization_the_biggest/.

UPDATE: On February 12th, Trump Administration repealed federal pollution limits, known as the Endangerment Finding. The Trump administration's 2026 repeal of the Endangerment Finding which moves the legal and scientific foundation for regulating greenhouse gases under the Clean Air Act, directly impacts power plant emissions by **eliminating the obligation to limit carbon pollution**. This action may increase CO2 emissions, **ease restrictions on coal-fired power plants**, and may impact efforts to transition to cleaner energy sources.

Source: Little, Jake. "Trump's EPA Kills the Endangerment Finding—the Legal Basis for Nearly Every Major US Climate Regulation." *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 12 Feb. 2026, thebulletin.org/2026/02/trumps-epa-kills-the-endangerment-finding/.



HCI Board Leadership Transition

Hometown Connections, Inc. (HCI) announced a significant transition in its Board of Directors leadership.

Randy Howard, General Manager of the Northern California Power Agency (NCPA) and Chair of the HCI Board of Directors since 2018, announced his retirement effective March 2026. Following a unanimous vote by the Board of Directors on January 11, 2026, the leadership role passed to current board member Brannndon Kelley, Senior Vice President of Strategy and Innovation and Chief Strategy Office for American Municipal Power, Inc. (AMP), who will serve as the new Chair of the HCI Board.



Randy Howard, Outgoing HCI Board Chair and Brannndon Kelley, Incoming HCI Board Chair.

A Legacy of Leadership: Randy Howard

Randy Howard's tenure as Board Chair has been marked by a steadfast commitment to the mission of public power. Since taking the helm in 2018, Howard has guided HCI through a period of immense growth and technological evolution. His retirement in March 2026 will conclude an illustrious career of over 40 years in the utility industry, including his impactful leadership at NCPA and previously at the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP).

"Randy's vision and advocacy for community-owned utilities have been instrumental in shaping the success of Hometown Connections," said Marc Gerken, CEO of Hometown Connections. "We are deeply grateful for his steady hand, his strategic wisdom, and the legacy of excellence he leaves behind for the entire public power community."

The Path Forward: Brannndon Kelley

Incoming Chair Brannndon Kelley brings more than 25 years of experience in technology, innovation, and strategic leadership to the role. Since joining the HCI Board in 2021, Kelley has been a pivotal voice in the organization's pursuit of transformative solutions for its members. His extensive background includes:

1. Over 15 years in executive leadership at AMP, where he has been a driving force behind the organization's digital and strategic transformation.
2. Prior senior management roles at industry giants such as HP and EDS.
3. Recognition as a national leader in utility innovation, including being named "Intelligent Utility's CIO of the Year" and a recipient of the "Frost & Sullivan CIO Impact Award."

"I am honored to accept the chairmanship of the Hometown Connections Board," said Kelley. "Randy Howard has been an exceptional mentor and leader, and I look forward to building upon the foundation he established. My commitment to the public power business model is stronger than ever, and I am eager to continue working alongside our partners and affiliates to ensure our community-owned utilities have the tools they need to thrive in a rapidly changing energy landscape."

2026 APPA Joint Action Agency Conference, Destin Florida



Keynote speaker Scott Corwin, President and CEO of APPA, speaking with Jeff Haas, Sr. VP, Membership & Marketing, APPA, and Jolene Thompson, President and CEO at AMP.

The American Public Power Association held their annual Join Action Conference in Destin, Florida from January 11-13, 2026. The conference brought together over 160 Public Power CEOs and senior management of joint action agencies and state associations, their board members, and commissioners to discuss public power’s policy and management challenges such as emerging policy, regulatory, power supply issues, and other topics related to the governance and management of joint action agencies.

The topic for the keynote presentation was “*Keeping Up With Changes at the EPA and Beyond.*” Keynote speakers were Scott Corwin, President and CEO of APPA, and Michael Nasi, Partner of the Environmental & Legislative Practice Group | Jackson Walker.

Next year’s meeting has already been set and will be held January 10-12, 2027, in San Diego, California.



Steve Donkersloot, Director for Strategic Resources, Michigan Public Power spoke at the conference.



Brannndon Kelley and Jolene Thompson, AMP.



Ken Rutter, COO, Florida Municipal Power Agency spoke at the conference.



Mark Ennis, Manager, Energy Southeast, and Tim Blodgett, CSO Platt River Power Authority.



Representative for HCI's Partner, PowerSecure.



Representative for HCI's Partner, SpryPoint.



Representatives for HCI's Partner Energy Southeast.



Annette DuPont-Ewing, Director of Marketing, HCI, Inc.



Annette DuPont-Ewing, HCI and Robbie Tugwell, PowerSecure.



Jim Rob, President and CEO, of the North American Electric Reliability Corporation.

Why **YOU** Can't Miss the 2026 HCI Annual Gathering

The public power landscape is moving faster than ever. To keep up, you don't need another sit-and-listen conference – you need a plan. That's why Hometown Connections Inc. (HCI) is reimagining our **2026 Annual Gathering being held in Denver, Colorado from April 8-9, 2026.**

This year, we're moving away Partner-led messaging and putting the spotlight where it belongs: on you, our **Affiliate members.** If you're a Joint Action Agency or State Association leader, this is the one event where your specific needs drive the agenda.

A True Working Meeting: This isn't about filling notebooks — it's about rolling up sleeves. The 2026 Gathering is designed as a working meeting focused on the real-world challenges keeping you up at night. Together, we'll identify issues, collaborate on solutions, and send you home with ideas you can use.

Agenda Highlights:

- **The Five-Year Outlook.**
Scott Corwin, CEO of APPA, will give the keynote address on navigating a rapidly changing landscape and shifting from reactive management to strategic planning. Scott will be with us throughout the conference, giving you an opportunity to speak with him firsthand.
- **Protecting Your Community: Data Centers** – what to insist on to protect rates and ratepayers!
- **Affiliate Spotlights:** Share your own “wins” and “unsolved challenges” to get real-time feedback.
- **Strategic & Wellness Checks:** Learn about the “HCI Business Assessment,” (think of it as an annual physical for your utility) and explore the foundations of successful strategic planning with Mark McCain.



Scott Corwin, CEO of APPA spoke at APPA's Joint Action Conference in January of this year.

Your Voice Matters! We strongly urge you to attend and lend your voice to these conversations. Your insights help shape stronger outcomes for everyone.

Networking & Logistics: While the work is serious, the connections matter just as much.

- **Kick-Off Reception:** Join us on the evening of April 8th for a fun, nautical-themed reception. (Dress the part! Prizes will be awarded!).
- **Cost: FREE** for HCI Affiliates and Partners (includes breakfasts and lunches).
- **Location:** Residence Inn by Marriott Denver City Center. 1725 Champa St, Denver, CO. Secure your spot and book your room at the special Hometown Connections rate. Call 303-536-7337.

REGISTER TODAY: E-mail Annette DuPont-Ewing at acdupont-ewing@hometownconnections.com



HCI Owner



GRACE SAWYER

Grace Sawyer serves as the Controller and Human Resources Administrator for the Vermont Public Power Supply Authority (VPPSA), where she has been a key member of the organization since 2022. Shortly after joining VPPSA, she led a successful enterprise resource planning (ERP) implementation that significantly enhanced efficiency and streamlined operations within the Finance Department.

Her career spans more than two decades in finance, regulatory compliance, and organizational leadership. Before joining VPPSA, Grace spent 18 years as an officer at a financial institution, holding a variety of roles in finance, regulatory oversight, and compliance. She later advanced into leadership positions within a Vermont Supervisory Union and served as Controller for a group of U.S. manufacturing facilities, further broadening her operational and managerial expertise.

Grace holds an Associate of Science in Accounting from the Community College of Vermont. She is also deeply committed to community service, having served five years on the Board of the Lamoille Area Cancer Network and contributing a decade to its fundraising committee. Outside of her professional and volunteer work, Grace enjoys motorcycle rides with her husband and spending time outdoors with her husband and grandchildren.

Grace can be contacted by email at gsawyer@vppsa.com or by phone at (802) 882-8510.

Vermont Public Power Supply Authority (VPPSA)

Vermont Public Power Support Authority (VPPSA) is a joint action agency established in 1979. VPPSA's membership includes multiple locally owned municipal electric utilities in Vermont. VPPSA provides its members with a broad spectrum of services such as power aggregation, financial support, information technology, rate planning support, and legislative and regulatory representation. Their mission is to provide exceptional value to their community-owned utility members through collaboration, advocacy and insights and to promote, advance, and support public power communities in Vermont and beyond.

Contact Information for Vermont Public Power

Address: P. O. Box 126, 5195 Waterbury-Stowe Road, Waterbury Center, VT 05677

Website: <https://vppsa.com/>

HCI Welcomes a New Partner: Quanam

Hometown Connections Inc. is proud to announce a strategic partnership with Quanam, Global Data and AI Leader, to deliver DAPLAN, a cutting-edge financial planning and analysis (FP&A) solution. This partnership brings a “quantum leap” in financial agility to public power utilities and joint action agencies!

As the energy sector faces rapid transformation, public power utilities require faster, more accurate financial modeling to navigate rate changes, capital projects, and risk management. DAPLAN for Utilities offers a purpose-built solution that integrates seamlessly with existing ERP and operating systems (CIS, EAM), enabling finance leaders to drive smarter decisions with real-time data.



“We are thrilled to welcome Quanam into the Hometown Connections family of partners,” said Marc Gerken, CEO of Hometown Connections, Inc. “This is exactly the kind of innovation our industry needs right now. The ability to move from static spreadsheets to dynamic, AI-driven scenario modeling in just eight weeks is a gamechanger for public power utilities! We are incredibly impressed with Quanam’s management team and their commitment to the public power sector. This tool doesn’t just save time; it empowers our utilities to tell their financial story with confidence and precision.”

A Leap Forward in Utility Planning: DAPLAN leverages the robust IBM Planning Analytics platform to deliver enterprise-grade performance without the enterprise-grade wait times.

Key benefits for HCI members include:

- **Rapid Deployment:** A fully functional implementation in as little as 8 weeks, with no “rip-and-replace” of existing systems required.
- **AI-Powered Forecasting:** Utilizes multi-variable models for load and revenue forecasting, connecting historical demand with current trends.
- **Significant Efficiencies:** Proven to reduce budgeting time by 63% and data processing time by 80%, allowing staff to focus on analysis rather than entry.
- **Cost Effectiveness:** Offers up to 60% lower development costs compared to traditional custom solutions, with transparent pricing and no vendor lock-in.

Powered by Global Expertise: DAPLAN is powered by Quanam, a recognized leader in the data and analytics space. Quanam has been highlighted in the Gartner & Market Guide for Data & Analytics Service Providers” underscoring their global expertise in the utilities and energy industry. Their deep experience ensures that DAPLAN is not just a software tool, but a solution backed by industry-specific knowledge that addresses the unique regulatory and operational challenges of public power.

See the Technology in Action: Want to learn more about the power of DAPLAN? Get in touch with Nicole Halm, Chief Sales Officer at Quanam. She can be reached at nhalm@quanam.com, or by telephone (267) 848-1323 or please visit www.hometownconnections.com or www.daplan.us.

Upcoming 2026 Conferences

- Feb 23-25** **APPA Legislative Rally, Washington, D.C.**
<https://www.publicpower.org/event/legislative-rally>
- Mar 13-14** **FMEA 25th Annual Florida Lineman Competition, Tallahassee, FL**
<https://www.flpublicpower.com/events/fmea-2026-florida-lineman-competition>
- Mar 27-28** **APPA Lineworkers Rodeo, Huntsville, AL**
<https://www.publicpower.org/event/lineworkers-rodeo>
- Mar 29-Apr 1** **APPA Engineering & Operations Conference, Huntsville, AL**
<https://www.publicpower.org/event/engineering-operations-conference>
- Mar 29-Apr 1** **APPA Safety Summit, Huntsville, AL**
<https://www.publicpower.org/event/safety-summit>
- Apr 8-9** **Hometown Connections Inc Annual Gathering, Denver, CO**
Registration Site Forthcoming
- Apr 12-14** **APPA CEO & Utility Managers Roundtable, Terranea Resort, CA**
<https://www.publicpower.org/event/ceo-roundtable>
- Apr 14-15** **Smart City Expo USA, West Palm Beach, FL**
<https://tomorrowcity.us/>
- Apr 14-15** **Energy Bar Association (EPA) Annual Meeting & Conference, Washington, DC.**
<https://www.eba-net.org/event/2026-eba-annual-conference/>
- Apr 14-16** **2026 IUCX Conference, Tampa, FL**
<https://www.iucx.org/conference-2026>
- Apr 21-22** **APPA Accounting & Financial Virtual Summit (*virtual event*)**
<https://www.publicpower.org/event/accounting-finance-summit>
- May 4-8** **APPA Spring Education Institute, San Antonio, TX**
<https://www.publicpower.org/event/education-institute>
- May 6-7** **Missouri River Energy Services (MRES) 61st Annual Meeting, Sioux Falls, SD**
<https://www.mrenergy.com/event/mres-annual-meeting-3>
- Nov 8-11** **NARUC Annual Meeting & Education Conference4, Puerto Rico**
<https://www.publicpower.org/event/education-institute>

To have your conference listed, please send information to acdupont-ewing@hometownconnections.com

HCI Blog

HCI Blog: A Platform for Collaboration and Innovation

<https://blog.hometownconnections.com/>

HCI warmly invites all its Partners and Affiliates to actively contribute to the blog. Whether it's sharing a recent project, providing commentary on industry trends, or offering advice based on your experiences, your input is highly valued. This collaborative effort will not only highlight the incredible work being accomplished across the network but also provide a valuable resource for continuous learning and development.

How to Contribute

Contributing to the HCI blog is straightforward. Interested Partners and Affiliates need to follow these simple steps:

- **Write your article:** Focus on topics that you are enthusiastic about and that would benefit the HCI community or public power in general.
- **Submit your article:** Send your completed article to acdupont-ewing@hometownconnections.com.



Want to
STAND OUT
in a Crowd?

Advertise on the HCI Blog and/or in the HCI Newsletter!

Reach a targeted and engaged audience by advertising in our professionally rebranded newsletter, distributed by HCI Affiliate members (Joint Action Agencies) to their utility customers. This is a fantastic opportunity to promote your company and services directly to decision-makers and create business opportunities across multiple communities.

Space is limited, so reserve your spot today and get your business in front of the right audience.



Hometown Connections, Inc. is a national non-profit utility services organization specializing in the unique challenges facing community-owned utilities. For more than 25 years, HCI has helped municipal systems transform their processes and systems by facilitating access to industry-leading technology, services, and consulting.

Owners

- American Municipal Power, Inc.
- Energy Southeast
- Missouri Public Utility Alliance
- Northern California Power Agency
- Vermont Public Power Supply Authority

Marketing Affiliates

- Energy Northwest
- Florida Municipal Electric Association
- Illinois Municipal Electric Agency
- Indiana Municipal Utilities Agency
- Michigan Municipal Electric Association
- Minnesota Municipal Utilities Association
- Missouri River Energy Services
- Municipal Electric Systems of Oklahoma
- Nebraska Municipal Power Pool
- Southern Minnesota Municipal Power Agency
- Tennessee Municipal Electric Power Association
- Texas Public Power Association

Sales Affiliates

- American Municipal Power, Inc.
- ElectriCities of North Carolina
- Energy Southeast
- Indiana Municipal Power Agency
- Missouri Public Utility Alliance
- Oklahoma Municipal Power Authority
- Piedmont Municipal Power Agency

Partners

- Acumen
- DivDat
- Energy Southeast, A Cooperative District
- Exacter
- Great Blue
- Hometown Connections
- Katama Technologies, Inc.
- Leverage Leadership
- Marsh USA
- MFP Connect
- PowerSecure
- Quanam
- Questline Digital
- SpryPoint
- Stem
- The Energy Authority
- Utility Financial Solutions

HCI Board of Directors:

- Randy S. Howard, Chair
- Brandon Renaud, Vice Chair
- Ken Nolan, Treasurer
- Jeff Haas, Secretary
- Mark Ennis, Member
- Branndon Kelley, Member

HCI Team

- Marc Gerken, P.E., President and CEO
- Nilaksh Kothari, P.E., Executive Consultant
- Mark McCain, Exec. Consultant for Strategic Planning
- Annette DuPont-Ewing, Director of Marketing
- Mike Mazingo, Director of Affiliate Relationships