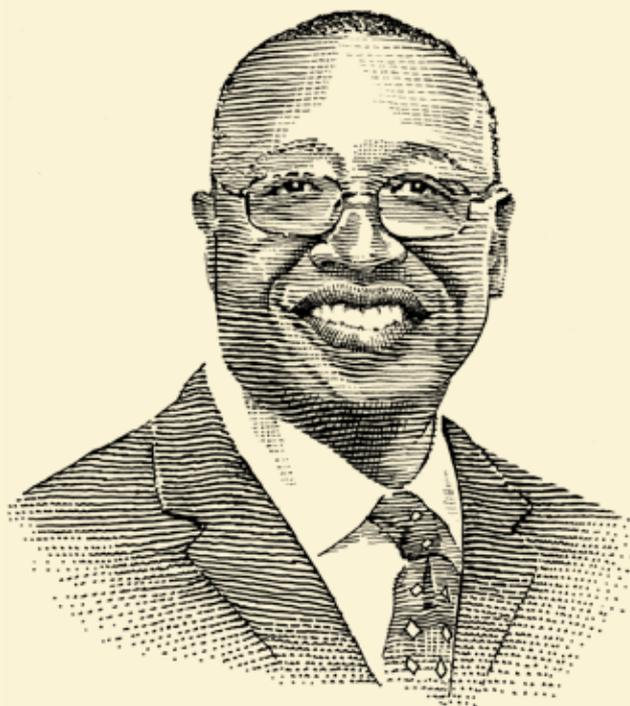


New Leader at American Association of Blacks in Energy



Conversation with AABE's new interim CEO,
Ralph Cleveland



change is a fundamental part of life. The American Association of Blacks in Energy, or AABE, is undergoing a shift in the leadership arena, noted in these pages last month. Paula Glover, former AABE CEO took the reins at The Alliance to Save Energy early January.

Fortunately, AABE had a gifted leader in waiting, who happened to be past Chair of AABE’s national board, was also past Nicor Gas President, and whose achievements are too numerous to list here. Ralph Cleveland is named AABE’s interim CEO.

Here, he delves into the significance of taking the reins at this important organization. AABE’s strong voice proposes a lot of action in this discussion. Listen in.

PUF’s Steve Mitnick: Something big has happened with The American Association of Blacks in Energy.

Ralph Cleveland: Yes. My friend, Paula Glover [former AABE CEO], has begun a new industry leadership role. We’re excited for her. She will always be family and AABE is certainly her home. But she and I have been in constant contact and I am excited to take on this new role.

We talked about what the transition might look like for the organization. Because I’m a former chair of the national board I understand the association, its culture and its value. I love this organization and I’ve been engaged and involved for over a decade.

A lot of time has been spent with AABE leadership about a forward vision for the organization.

I’m most excited about taking this on, at this pivotal moment for equity in the energy industry. We will use our time, trying to direct efforts in such a way that we can achieve greater impact for our industry.

PUF: What’s the average day like for you as the head of AABE?

Ralph Cleveland: It can be varied. First and foremost, I remind myself that we’re a membership organization. I ask what we are doing to serve their needs, keeping them informed and engaged with issues that particularly affect our African American community. That’s whether there are policy challenges or other critical issues going on in the energy sector.

Then we look to provide leadership and a voice for the needs and aspirations of African Americans and certainly for communities of color. We want to provide that voice to leaders in the energy industry. I take that as a sacred responsibility.

I’m honored to take that mantle up and carry it forward. Paula has done a terrific job in the many and diverse audiences that she’s had the opportunity to engage with, and I want to continue that engagement.

We also look to provide insight to policymakers about how that policy impacts our community. At times, there can be serious unintended consequences on our community from some of these policy decisions, just because there’s no one there to put voice to how these policies impact and impinge upon our community.

We continually update and align our policy principles because they represent our commitment to equity and inclusion.

As an example, we’re partnering with Bi-Partisan Policy

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Center to conduct a study on environmental justice and infrastructure development. We’ll take a look at past behavior, community impact, and then make some recommendations.

While it doesn’t all happen in a day’s work, our AABE team achieves a great deal in the programs and

events we execute. We hold a series of webinars each month. We host a national conference every year.

The national conference is the highlight of every energy year. We invite leaders from every corner of the industry to share their insights, provide an understanding of industry trends, and allow them the opportunity to interact with our membership, and gain further insight as they look to manage an increasingly diverse workforce, and a more complex world with more communities wanting to get engaged.

PUF: There are probably more people talking with you saying, let’s have conversations. Whether it’s CEOs of industry companies or folks in your chapters, AABE’s responsibilities and mission are even more in the limelight.

Ralph Cleveland: That is for sure. There is a different level of engagement. We are being engaged more intently and, in some cases, more intensely around these issues. I frame it as I’ve heard the term JEDI, justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion, and we welcome that.

We have a lot to offer in this space, whether it’s increasing the pipeline of talent coming into the industry from our communities or increasing the levels of opportunities available for industry professionals through leadership and professional development or increasing opportunities through entrepreneurship and helping companies in the supply chain area.

It’s helping partners understand how they can increase diversity and support black-owned businesses as they look to grow

their business. We will work with them to eliminate barriers to development and access to opportunity. We want to highlight some of those opportunities and provide transparency so we can create more equitable outcomes in the energy space.

We also want to identify and place emphasis on folks in our community that are eminently qualified to take on larger roles in the broader industry, whether in a regulatory framework or the industry more broadly.

PUF: Talk about your experience in the industry and also your vision going forward for AABE.

Ralph Cleveland: I started in the energy sector. I got an engineering degree from Georgia Tech and started my career in Falfurrias, Texas. I was working as a process engineer in a gas plant, as well as having facilities engineering responsibility for newly completed wells, putting them online, and processing the oil and gas so we could get it into sales pipelines. From there, I held multiple positions as I grew in the industry.

I was blessed to get my MBA from Tulane. Then I got a call from a headhunter who said, we've got this job that we think has your name written all over it. It's a job with Atlanta Gas Light. At the time Paula Rospot was the CEO.

I had a great career, and progressed from Region Manager, to VP of Engineering and Construction, to SVP of Engineering and Operations, to EVP and President of several subsidiaries and, eventually to EVP and President of Nicor Gas. From my energy and leadership experiences I moved to AIG Insurance. At AIG, I was SVP and Global Head of Customer Operations, Business Transformation, and Supply Chain.

In 2016, I decided it was time for me to hang my shingle and bring my experiences back to the industry. I started my consulting firm, Cleveland & Associates. That was partly because I didn't want to move my family and I didn't want to do the travel I was doing working for a global company.

In terms of what I envision for the future of AABE, we have an ambitious set of aspirations, and it is about how do we impact the various communities we're here to serve? For our members, we want to be a source of information and inspiration.

We want to mentor, train, and do whatever we need to do to impart an understanding of the business and the opportunity to develop skills, as well as gain exposure in this industry for our members.

For our community, we want to advocate, and what I mean by advocate, is an educational role, helping everyone understand how these decisions and policies impact our community.

In that sense, we think that will help provide some layer of protection against some of the unintended consequences that could occur if we don't provide that voice. We want to inform our community. Relative to the opportunities that are available in this industry, we want to attract additional talent from our community into this industry.

For the industry, we want to collaborate. We want to convene and have the right conversations.

In so many instances, we think the problem is there are missing conversations with the right people. Convening and collaborating, is key for us in terms of leadership in the industry.

For our broader diaspora, we want to inspire, support, and illuminate. We want to provide insight. We are uniquely positioned in the world. We have access to eminently talented and knowledgeable resources that are in our community, that we know can help provide broader leadership for those developing countries that are in our diaspora.

For our future generations and posterity, we want to build. We want to build something to help sustain our community, put the right structures in place, think systemically about overcoming barriers, and build the right structures and institutions that help

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overcome some of the systemic roadblocks that exist for those in our community to be able to come into this industry and thrive.

PUF: What would you tell young people, because this is a good industry for them.

Ralph Cleveland: I'm biased. I think this is the best industry for them. Here's the way I would describe it. I describe it this way to entrepreneurs as well, so not just young people, but to

entrepreneurs looking for opportunities and who have capabilities that may be adjacent.

This industry is not going anywhere. These are services that are needed the world over. You can't have economic progress without providing the energy infrastructure and delivery of the energy that's going to be needed for all the economic activity. We are the backbone of every single economic activity. You can't even move data around without energy.

We should understand how this industry is being transformed today. We need people with the technical know-how and creative imagination to bring that change in this industry. We've got a unique opportunity to do that, particularly as we take on issues like microgrids, electric vehicles, and alternative energy, and what they mean to the consumer.

I don't think you could come into this industry at a better time, learn it, and carve out a career for yourself and go from an entry level professional, thinking about what you want to do with your career.

What we're going to do at AABE to support students is provide a structure by which they can know and understand what their

career progression can look like. We can help them think about career paths and career designs.

You can decide, this is where I ultimately want to be. Whether it's a leader in the large companies, or you want to start your own business, whatever that aspiration is, AABE wants to help

Lewis Latimer's Breakthrough Patent

(Cont. from p. 33)

with, in a matter of months, were decisive in causing there to be a bold invention to change the world, rich and poor.

Of course Latimer, he's just an engineer with Maxim's company and then on his own. There's a point where Edison

illuminate the pathway so you don't have to wonder what that should look like.

We need all the creative imagination they can bring to every single supply chain. But we also want to help them understand the challenges to overcome. That's what we aspire to do. **PUF**

sues Latimer over a patent. Edison obviously thought, there's something there. They went back and forth, but of course the Edison team crushed Latimer. Edison's got all these lawyers and experts, and PhDs from Princeton. And Latimer, he's in his little two bedroom apartment with nothing. So, Edison crushes that lawsuit. It is decided in 1884. As far as I can tell, Edison hires Latimer only weeks after he wins the lawsuit. Seriously. He crushes Latimer in the lawsuit, and then hires the guy. **PUF**

Black History Month

(Cont. from p. 29)

I invited fifty organizations in the city to come, everyone from all of our universities, Howard University, and all of them. We had government officials, contractors, all of the major utilities, and trade associations. We invited them all.

I asked for C-suite level people to come. I thought I'd get a handful of people. All fifty people showed up. For a year, we talked about what are some of the barriers and hurdles that we're seeing to increasing supply and workforce diversity in our industry?

They've come up with some best practices. Now, I should be receiving that report any day now, but those are the types of things we have to do if we're going to make a difference.

PUF: Are you optimistic?

Willie Phillips: I often think about my mom and the world she grew up in and the world that I grew up in and live in now. I'm her wildest dreams. You cannot deny we are moving in the right direction.



The election of one of our recent presidents and the election of our vice president-elect is proof of that. My little girl who's nine is going to have a bright future. **PUF**

At the NARUC Winter Policy Summit February 9: Has Net Energy Metering Had Its Day in the Sun? Bright Ideas for Compensating Distributed Generation

Co-sponsored by the Committee on Electricity and Committee on Energy Resources and the Environment

As adoption of rooftop solar and other distributed energy resources (DERs) continues to grow, many states are implementing or considering changes to net energy metering (NEM) rates compensating energy exports to the grid. There is increasing agreement that NEM rates do not convey the full value of distributed energy to DER owners. However, stakeholders have not yet reached consensus about whether – and by how much – NEM rates overstate or understate the value of these resources. These discussions have brought a critical question before public utility commissions: how should regulators approach revising NEM rates in a manner that reduces carbon emissions, maintains reliability, encourages beneficial electrification, minimizes costs, and achieves equitable DER adoption? This panel will offer multiple perspectives from participants in recent NEM revision dockets. Panelists will offer lessons learned from their own experiences and recommendations on how commissions can facilitate an inclusive, productive process.