

## **Transcript of Power Chat – In the Electric Lounge**

### **Season 2 – Episode 4 “Powering the Future: Understanding Generative AI in Your Electric Cooperative”**

**April 9, 2026**

**0:08 – 0:22**

**Narrator:** Power Chat in the Electric Lounge is powered by SECO Energy, an electric distribution cooperative serving over 260,000 members across parts of seven Central Florida counties. For more information about us, visit [secoenergy.com](http://secoenergy.com).

**0:24 – 1:11**

**Curtis Wynn, Chief Executive Officer:** Well, hello and welcome to another episode of Power Chat in the Electric Lounge. I'm Curtis Wynn, and today we're diving into a topic that's generating a lot of headlines and a lot of questions. Generative artificial intelligence, or Generative AI. You've probably heard about tools like ChatGPT or AI systems that can write, draw, or even create videos. What does that have to do with your electric cooperative? Is this just another tech trend, or is it something that could meaningfully impact how we serve our members? To help us unpack all of this, I'm joined by our Vice President of Corporate Strategy, Innovation, and Technology, Tolu Omotoso. Thank you for being here.

**1:12 – 1:29**

**Tolu Omotoso, Vice President, Corporate Strategy, Innovation, and Technology:** Thank you, Mr. Wynn, and thanks for having me and thanks to all our listeners out there. I'm really excited to talk about this topic. You know, it's one of the most transformative technologies we've seen in decades, so it absolutely has implications for electric cooperatives like SECO Energy. I'm happy to be here to help unpack all of it.

**1:30 – 1:52**

**Curtis Wynn:** Well, let's get started. So, let's start with the beginning. When people hear this term Generative AI, it sounds very complicated, or it could be even a little bit intimidating for some. So, would you begin the unpacking of this and sort of give us a very simplified definition of what this is?

**1:53 – 2:49**

**Tolu Omotoso:** Yeah, absolutely, and that's really a great place to start. On the back end, what is going on behind the scenes is highly complex and highly complicated. We don't want to go there, but let's stay on the front end with tools like ChatGPT like you mentioned earlier, and what they can do. So, the keyword here is generative. So, we have these new tools that can now use data, crunch data, and then express it in ways that we've not seen before. They can generate new content, audio, video, pictures, whatever. Most things right now that you can really communicate directly with these AI tools to produce new content. The type of AI that we had in the past were just very simple. If this is this, do that. If X is A, Y, Z. Those kinds of tools existed in the past, but then with these new tools now, they can generate new content, not just based on ordinary instructions.

**2:49 – 2:58**

**Curtis Wynn:** So, it's not your, I guess we could say, an old guy, like me. It's not your Google. This is something, this is creating something new, right?

**2:59 – 3:24**

**Tolu Omotoso:** Yes. You could picture this as Google on steroids, right? So, Google look at Google as going into a library, and you're looking for a book, then you find a book, and then you can read the content. So, it retrieves information that has been stored. But with tools like ChatGPT, it goes way further than that. They navigate through an enormous amount of data sets to generate new content that is not available before now.

**3:25 – 3:40**

**Curtis Wynn:** Okay, so we looked up one day, and it seems like this AI, Generative AI, just appeared overnight. But I know that's not really true. So, can you give us a little bit of just a brief history of this new technology?

**3:41 – 5:23**

**Tolu Omotoso:** Well, so AI has been around since, I think, like the 1950s, and early AI just focused on rule-based systems. So basically, machines following strict instructions. But then, around the 1990s and then in the 2000s, we saw the rise of machine learning. And instead of programming every rule that we have, we were able to train computers on data, and that's when AI really began to kind of like improve in areas like fraud detection and then also weather forecasting. Actually, the real breakthrough came in the last decade with massive computing power and then also cloud technology like AWS, Amazon Web Services, Microsoft Azure, and all those other cloud technologies. Now we're able to store an enormous amount of data sets in the cloud, and then with advanced neural networks, this access to NMS data sets became easy to navigate with tools like this new AI tools that

we're talking about. A major innovation called the transformer model kind of changed everything. That's the architecture that powers the modern large language models called LLMs like ChatGPT. So then, in 2022, Generative AI tools became publicly accessible. So, we had access to tools like ChatGPT, Claude, and all these other tools came mainstream around 2022, and then pretty much almost exploded overnight just because of the ease of use of these new tools that people can now kind of communicate with. In the past, you needed to be able to do programming languages like Python, COBOL, and all those things. But now you can pretty much communicate with them with natural language, and that's how they kind of blew up overnight. I would say around 2022.

**5:24 – 5:44**

**Curtis Wynn:** You mentioned something I want to expand on. When you said cloud, the cloud, I remember when the cloud just became a thing because I used to put all my stuff on a floppy disk and a hard drive, and I had to take it from one computer to the next and plug it in. But this cloud sort of made it accessible anywhere I went, right?

**5:45 – 5:56**

**Tolu Omotoso:** That is correct. So having access, easy access to data storage, and also large amounts of data storage was part of the key to unlocking all of these new possibilities with Generative AI.

**5:56 – 6:03**

**Curtis Wynn:** So that helped with the speed and how it really took off so quickly. Is there anything else that you think that would have caused it to take off so quickly?

**6:04 – 6:31**

**Tolu Omotoso:** That was a big part of it, and also part of that was also these new models that we have coming on, like the transformer model I mentioned earlier, and then also things like we call neural networks. So being able to connect data sets in a way that kind of represents the way human beings think and act, and having those powerful tools to be able to extract information from those data sets, helped with cloud technology to advance our AI tools.

**6:32 – 6:41**

**Curtis Wynn:** So, let's bring it closer to SECO. Let's bring it close to home. Our members are probably wondering, what does this mean for SECO Energy, and why should it even matter to us?

**6:42 – 8:00**

**Tolu Omotoso:** Well, it matters because it's going to affect the way they live their life on a daily basis, right? So ChatGPT is out there for everyone to use. Right now, there are so many AI tools out there, and then also internally at SECO, we have some of these tools that we have licensed for our employees to use, and then also we have other tools that we're trying to pilot. So, the tools are going to help improve services to our members. For example, it could help us improve member communication during outages. It could also help us improve operational efficiency because as we have more data sets, we have AI tools to navigate and crunch those data sets to help us make more informed decisions about how we operate at the grid at SECO. It also helps us in data analysis support. Now we're using data in almost everything we do at SECO. Part of our goal this year, strategy goal, is to build a data enterprise data strategy to help us utilize the data set that we're getting from our new technologies like AMI, SCADA, OMS, and everything like that to improve how we make decisions on the grid, and then also we're trying to use these tools to enable our employees. So, our focus at SECO is workforce enablement using AI tools, and when you combine all of this together, ultimately it impacts the way we service our members in a positive direction.

**8:01 – 8:06**

**Curtis Wynn:** Tolu, you mentioned two or three times in that brief segment where you mentioned people.

**8:07 – 8:07**

**Tolu Omotoso:** Yes.

**8:07 – 8:18**

**Curtis Wynn:** I know we have employees watching our podcast, and I'm sure the question is in the back of a lot of people's minds: Is this thing about replacing people?

**8:18 – 8:52**

**Tolu Omotoso:** No, it's not. At SECO, our focus is using AI to enable our employees to do more. So why spend five, ten hours crunching through data sets that an AI tool can help you to do in maybe an hour or less? Now it just focuses our attention or helps move our employees to more valuable tasks or projects. So, we can replace the repetitive, boring tasks with AI tools, and they can focus on more value-driven and value-producing tasks that actually helps our members.

**8:52 – 9:09**

**Curtis Wynn:** Wow. So, practical applications that our employees can use to better serve the members, which is really what we're all about. Are there any other examples of some of those practical applications that we here at SECO could use to better serve our members?

**9:10 – 11:21**

**Tolu Omotoso:** Yes, and I think one that I would like to maybe touch on is member service. You know, so almost every member at some point will have contact with a member service representative. Maybe it's at the beginning of getting your service as a new member at SECO, or you know, ongoing maybe member service contact, or anything, maybe from bill inquiries to whatever information you want to get from SECO, and SECO is growing very, very fast. SECO is one of the fastest-growing cooperatives in the nation, and we have people moving into a service territory who do not have English as their primary language. So, we want to be able to make sure that we're able to serve these members as effectively and efficiently as we serve our English-speaking members. But to do that, typically we would have to, you know, our member services team would have to engage a translation service because sometimes we have somebody move in, and we currently have people that speak Spanish, for example, you know, as our member services representative. But you know, there are certain other languages that just come up because somebody new just moved into the environment, and to provide service to that member, we typically have to engage a translation service, which is like a third party service that we pay for an hourly basis for them to translate what the member is trying to say to our member service rep and then vice versa. So sometimes this is inefficient. So, what we're trying to do right now is to look at options for AI translation within our member services space. So, with AI tools that can learn or understand maybe a thousand languages. Now, with that, it has the potential to improve service delivery to that member because now we're doing a real-time translation between the member and then also our member service rep using an AI tool that understands several languages. So that way, when we have new people moving to our territory, we don't have to go scrambling around looking for a member service rep that understands that particular language, because we already have this AI tool that understands maybe a thousand languages. So, it helps our member service to provide more value and more service to our members without actually replacing anybody on our staff.

**11:22 – 11:36**

**Curtis Wynn:** That's a perfect example of an application, and it sounds like this has a lot of opportunity, but as with anything, there's always the opportunity for risk. Are there risks with us applying this or utilizing this new tool?

**11:37 – 13:24**

**Tolu Omotoso:** Absolutely. So, with every new technology that you have out there, they come with risk. But what we're trying to do at SECO is to minimize this risk as much as possible, and to do that, we have, you know, developed an AI governance framework at SECO where we are able to evaluate any AI tool before it is approved for usage within the company. So, with that, we want to make sure that our data is secure. We value data privacy a lot at SECO. We don't want to put in any tool that would maybe breach or have any adverse effect on either our employee data or member data, and then also want to make sure that these tools are accurate. So, whatever we do, we kind of vet these tools based on accuracy, and in addition to that, we also make sure that we have a human in the loop all the time, verifying whatever these AI tools are producing, because sometimes they kind of like hallucinate, which is they create content or they reference content that has never existed. So, we want to make sure that our employees still stay in the loop, evaluating any work products from these AI tools. Then, as I mentioned also earlier, I want to make sure that this conforms to our cybersecurity standards. So, we have protocols at SECO that we use to evaluate every tool that comes onto our system to make sure they meet minimum cybersecurity standards. So, we evaluate all of that also, and then sometimes AI can be biased. So, we also check for bias within these tools to make sure that they are not providing or producing adverse content to our employees or to our members when we eventually roll them out. So, all of these put together kind of constitute a governance framework for AI within SECO to make sure that we minimize this risk as much as possible.

**13:25 – 13:41**

**Curtis Wynn:** Wow. So, the staff, getting into this along with the Board, established some governance policies around the utilization of AI. Can you give us some practical application to what those governance policies look like in practice?

**13:42 – 14:17**

**Tolu Omotoso:** Absolutely. So, for example, when we started evaluating AI tools at SECO, we shut down access to all external AI tools, and then we were able to evaluate some of those tools, and we approved a couple of them to be used internally. So we worked with the Board also to develop a board policy around AI, and then also within that policy, we were able to stipulate that AI tools are going to be used for enabling our employees, not replacing employees, and then also how these AI tools would be evaluated and implemented at SECO.

**14:18 – 14:29**

**Curtis Wynn:** Wow. So, all of that's great, but there's always that question that lingers in the back of our members' minds, and that is, is this going to impact their rates?

**14:30 – 14:36**

**Tolu Omotoso:** Well, I would say it could impact their rate, but it would be in the positive direction.

**14:36 – 14:36**

**Curtis Wynn:** Good.

**14:37 – 15:01**

**Tolu Omotoso:** So, as we deploy these tools and as we create more efficiencies, we become more effective in the way we service our members. We become more effective in the way we make decisions. Ultimately, this will result in a lower cost of operation for SECO, and since we're a not-for-profit, you know, we return whatever margin we get back to our members. This translates to reduced rates to our members in the future.

**15:02 – 15:22**

**Curtis Wynn:** I'm sure they're happy to hear that. Let's look ahead five to 10 years, and kind of look out on the Horizon. I know five to 10 years can seem like two hours in some cases, the way things are moving. But what do you think this means to electric cooperatives or SECO over the next five to 10 years?

**15:23 – 18:35**

**Tolu Omotoso:** Well, I predict in five to 10 years, especially in a digital world, is almost impossible. But I think I'll try. So, this is moving so fast. Five years ago, we didn't have ChatGPT. Nobody knew this was going to be a thing. But now we have it, so it's advancing very, very quickly. Every week or so, there's a new tool, a new model that comes out that is a really significant improvement to the previous models. But the way I see it at SECO and then also for electric utilities is being able to leverage this tool, this data analytics tool, or the capability for this AI to navigate through enormous amounts of data. So, currently we are building on the successful implementation of our AMI project, and it's bringing us back a lot of data, energy use data, and also growth data. Because each time we put an AMI meter out there, it tells us where our territory is growing, and we've kind of put this data in the data warehouse with other operational data sets from our SCADA system, OMS system, and we're trying to see how to create a network model that represents the way we operate our grid at SECO. This is called the digital twin of the grid, so building a digital twin of the grid produces a different level of opportunities for both SECO employees and then

also our members. We would be able to navigate through these data sets and be able to simulate the grid using data sets. So for example, if we have this digital twin of the grid at SECO built out and say we have a storm coming in, the H word we don't always want to mention, we could use this digital twin to simulate based on the category of the storm and say if it lands in this area, this is the amount of, of damage that we could, you know, expect and use that analysis to position crew in the right places to enable faster restoration. So that's just one use case. So, where I'm seeing in the future where we would have smarter grid analytics, where we can actually operate the grid in a very, very smarter, more efficient, and more effective way, it could also help us with load forecasting. So, with having enormous amount of data sets, we can pretty much pinpoint at a more granular level what our load is going to be, maybe in the next hour or even the next minute, depending on how much data sets that we have. So, it would help us that way to enhance operational planning for SECO, enhance wildfire or even storm prediction modeling, and then even it could help us with more personalized member communication. So, we have these tools that have learned our network, learned the way we operate, and the way we communicate with our members. Each time we have an outage, you could have a personalized communication for each member based on their energy use or based on the way we've interacted with them in the past. So, this will help us improve efficiency and service to our members and also to our employees within SECO.

**18:36 – 19:08**

**Curtis Wynn:** That sounds like what our members are really, really interested in. You know, I always say that our members are interested in two main things, that is how well we can manage costs and keep our rates reasonable, and the second is how well do we keep the lights on. So, all of this seems like it's more tools that SECO can use to do those two things when it gets right down to it. Now, Tolu, this has been very, very helpful. I want to give you an opportunity now, if you could leave our members with one thought about generative artificial intelligence, what would that be?

**19:09 – 20:08**

**Tolu Omotoso:** OK, so one message would be it is just another tool that we now have access to. So, you could go to Walmart, Lowe's, Home Depot, whatever, buy, you know, a toolbox. You know, you have a hammer in there, you have a screwdriver, you have pliers, and whatnot. So, within SECO, we have, you know, our linemen, we have our member services, we have our engineers, we have people working in finance and HR, and legal. Generative AI is just another tool that we can use to enhance service to our members. It is not a tool to replace employees. It is a tool to enhance service delivery to our members through our employees. Then our corporate mission doesn't change because of this. It only

changes the way we are more effectively able to meet those mission and values and deliver on them. So, when used responsibly, AI can help us operate smarter, communicate better, and serve our members more efficiently. But it will always be guided by people and by our cooperative values.

**20:09 – 20:37**

**Curtis Wynn:** I couldn't think of a better note to end on. And Tolu, thank you again for helping us unpack this very interesting new subject around Generative AI. To our members, thank you for listening to us today. If you have questions about technology, innovation, or how we're preparing for the future, we'd love to hear from you. Until next time, I'm Curtis Wynn, and thank you for being a part of your Electric Cooperative.