

JIM HARPER: THE BITCOIN FOUNDATION HASN'T REACHED ITS POTENTIAL

By Joel Dalais

Feb. 8, 2015

We have reached out to the candidates for the upcoming **Bitcoin Foundation Elections** and asked each candidate a set of questions. In the interest of fairness, all candidates were asked the same questions at the same time, and all responses (that did respond) have been received before the publication of this article.

Jim Harper

Jim Harper has nearly 15 years of experience in the non-profit world. He started his own small U.S. non-profit in 2000, and has worked for the last decade at the Cato Institute in Washington, D.C. He currently serves on the board of another non-profit foundation, the National Priorities Project. He was previously recruited by the Foundation as Global Policy Counsel, a role he no longer holds.

Tell us a little about your involvement in the Cryptocurrency (or related) sector?

I first learned about Bitcoin in early 2011 and writing in support of it a few months later. My first purchase of Bitcoin soon after that was on an exchange that was promptly hacked, which made me sensitive to the security and consumer protection challenges. Bitcoin brings together issues I've been studying and working on for years: open source software development, freedom to encrypt, privacy, monetary policy, and more. A piece I wrote in April 2013 started conversations with the Bitcoin Foundation that ultimately lead to my hiring as Global Policy Counsel about a year later.

What is your primary reason for running for a Director seat?

The Bitcoin Foundation hasn't reached its potential. It has a strong public brand, but an uneven reputation in the Bitcoin community. I'd like to see to it that the foundation has a solid sense of its mission, a plan to execute on that mission, an organization chart tailored to the purpose, staff who are up to the challenges, and a reliable fundraising operation. Smart, steady leadership that keeps the foundation producing results over a good period of time will make the foundation a clearly recognized leader in development of the Bitcoin ecosystem.

How do you plan to achieve this goal?

An important part of helping direct the foundation is my plan to repeat the risk management study I conducted for the foundation in late 2013/early 2014. The study assessed what Bitcoin is as a global public asset, the greatest threats to its success, and the likelihood and consequence of those threats. The original study was based on interviews with the foundation's leadership. The follow-up will use input from the foundation's entire membership. It may serve as a guide (though it can't supplant executive decision-making).

Once achieved what would be your secondary aim(s) as a Director?

The foundation hasn't settled on an identity that unites its individual and corporate members. There can be a great deal of power in an organization with the financial resources of the business community and the social and political resources of individual Bitcoin enthusiasts from around the world. Success in this area will take careful planning, a lot of communication with and among the membership, and time. There's no guarantee of success, but it's worth trying because of the great things a strong foundation can contribute to the Bitcoin ecosystem.

What are your thoughts on the free market?

I like it! The free market is the best way known to organize society's resources, and it is based on respect for individual rights.

Should there be interaction from the Foundation with regulatory bodies?

Given the significant effect regulators can have on Bitcoin adoption, I think interaction between the foundation and regulatory bodies is appropriate. The protocol doesn't care, but if politicians and regulators oppose Bitcoin, it could take fifty years or longer (who knows?) to achieve broad adoption, delivering Bitcoin's benefits to populations around the world. I agree with people who think of this as an unpleasant compromise from high-minded principles, but I want to see Bitcoin adopted worldwide, quickly.

What is your reasoning for the above answer?

The study referred to above found that risk-aversion in the financial services industry was the top threat to Bitcoin's success. While banks think that embracing Bitcoin is going to make trouble for them, they won't serve Bitcoin businesses or provide Bitcoin-based services themselves, delaying Bitcoin's widespread adoption. That suggests that public policy may be an appropriate priority for the foundation. If further study validates this, it may be a direction the foundation should go. I don't see the foundation jumping back into public policy soon, though, only with careful consideration, planning, and sure funding to support such work.

What do you think about alternative coins?

I like them! The more the merrier. I think the Bitcoin Foundation should support all decentralized cryptocurrencies, letting competition and innovation among them strengthen the ecosystem. I assume that strong network effects make Bitcoin the likely leader for a long time to come, but seeing it overtaken would be fascinating.

What do think about the international efforts of the Foundation?

I haven't been satisfied with them. I was enthused to see the foundation build its international presence by linking up with excellent Bitcoin leaders, but I don't think it was prepared for the role. The needs of the worldwide Bitcoin community are many and varied. As Global Policy Counsel, I was sometimes embarrassed and frustrated at not being able to help international affiliates (and others) with things they expected of me and the foundation.

What is your contact information for interested parties?

Email: Members, contact me via the foundation forums!

Website/blog: <http://btcpolicy.tumblr.com/>

Bitcoin Foundation: Jim Harper

Any other: https://twitter.com/jim_harper

The Distributed Opinion: <https://bitcoin-election.consider.it/jim-harper>

Is there anything else relevant you would like to mention?

Having a fully elected board is a democratic (partially decentralized) model for foundation governance that is not guaranteed to succeed. It requires the membership to take their responsibility as voters seriously. I appreciate the foundation members who are doing so. I think of the Bitcoin Foundation as a minor experiment next to the grand technical, economic, and social experiment known as cryptocurrency. Here's to the success of both!