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Bitcoin Foundation Parts Ways With Its Global Policy Counsel

By [Sydney Ember](#)

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The Bitcoin Foundation's global policy counsel, Jim Harper, has been dismissed. Credit Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images

Jim Harper, whose appointment as the Bitcoin Foundation's global policy counsel last March was viewed as a sign that the advocacy group was taking digital currency regulation seriously, has been dismissed from the foundation.

Mr. Harper's last day was Wednesday, though he received notice of the foundation's decision shortly after Thanksgiving.

Mr. Harper's dismissal comes as the Bitcoin Foundation is shifting its focus, from policy advocacy to Bitcoin technology and infrastructure development.

"We're changing direction a little bit here," said Patrick Murck, the foundation's executive director.

"The policy aspect was more of a distraction and a drain on resources that we could handle at the moment," he added. "Without having that work to be done, there really wasn't a huge role for Jim to do."

Before joining the Bitcoin Foundation, Mr. Harper served as director of information policy studies at the Cato Institute, a libertarian research group. He will remain at Cato as a senior fellow, a reduced role he took when he moved to the Bitcoin Foundation.

For his part, Mr. Harper said he wasn't quite ready to cut all ties to the Bitcoin Foundation, despite a difference of opinion on the foundation's direction. In an interview, Mr. Harper said he was still running for a position on the foundation's board.

Mr. Harper is running for election alongside a number of other Bitcoin enthusiasts, including Cody Wilson, who has opposed Bitcoin regulation and [told the Upstart Business Journal](#) that he was running “on a platform of the complete dissolution of the Bitcoin Foundation.”

The board election will take place in mid-February.

“My experience at the foundation was that it wasn’t an organization that had a lot of focus and direction,” Mr. Harper said in an interview. “Part of the reason I’m running for the board is because, whether I work there or not, I think the Bitcoin Foundation should have solid leadership and management from the top all the way down.”

When [Mr. Harper joined the Bitcoin Foundation](#) last year, regulators across the globe were grappling with how to treat virtual currency. At the time, Bitcoin supporters were reeling from the collapse of Mt. Gox, one of the biggest online Bitcoin exchanges. Mt. Gox had filed for bankruptcy protection after announcing that nearly 750,000 of its customers’ Bitcoins, worth close to \$500 million, had gone missing. Only months earlier, the online bazaar Silk Road, which was seen as a marketplace for illegal drugs and other illicit goods, had been shut down by federal authorities.

Now, however, Bitcoin appears in many ways to have shed its image as an outlaw currency.

Bitcoin supporters had been concerned with legitimizing the virtual currency to law enforcement, regulators and the public. But buoyed by clearer regulatory frameworks and the success of recent events — like the federal government’s two Bitcoin auctions — some supporters are turning their attention to Bitcoin’s core software development with the hopes of easing widespread adoption.

“There’s little doubt that we added tremendous value to the community by properly framing the conversation and building bridges for the Bitcoin community to engage directly with the regulators,” the Bitcoin Foundation [wrote in a blog post](#) last month about its new focus. “Others have followed and established policy organizations with clear and focused missions, a development that gives us the opportunity to focus on supporting Bitcoin Core and building the technical infrastructure needed to grow the Bitcoin network.”

Still, Mr. Murck, who [replaced Jon Matonis](#), one of the foundation’s founding board members, as executive director in October, praised Mr. Harper’s role in the foundation’s early policy initiatives but reiterated that their views on the foundation’s goals had diverged.

“I think Jim disagrees with the focus,” Mr. Murck said. “I would hope that at a personal level, it’s still amicable.”