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FINANCIAL SERVICES COMMITTEE
HOUSING AND INSURANCE SUBCOMMITTEE
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OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE



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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

February 8, 2018

Mr. Brock Pierce
Chairman of the Board
The Bitcoin Foundation
PO Box 3354
Belfair, WA 98528

Dear Chairman Pierce:

As technology evolves, bad actors are provided with opportunities to exploit platforms, misuse services, and commit crimes – sometimes before the private or public sectors are made aware of such capabilities. The rapid pace of technological change, and constantly evolving technological possibilities, means that laws and approaches are constantly evolving in response. Government, with all of its procedures and complexities, may move slower than the pace of technology at times, but does and will continue to rely on the private sector to implement timely responses to matters of technological concern. Financial technology has the potential to increase financial inclusion and access, improve efficiency, stimulate competition, and contribute to the stability of the financial services system.

Following the deadly course of events at the “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville last year, fintech companies, including online payment systems, tightened rules against using technology to fund hate and violence. Major crowdfunding platforms discontinued fundraisers on accounts linked to violent white supremacy groups, and a major transaction services company reiterated that its platform will not be used for “activities that promote hate, violence or racial intolerance”. In the aftermath of the tragedy in Charlottesville, fintech companies – acting in the best interest of society and industry – refused to facilitate the success of prejudicial campaigns.

Unfortunately, however, the actors that violated the terms and conditions of the aforementioned online payment systems have found an alternative in cryptocurrency. Troubling reports that extremist groups are soliciting funding through bitcoin have now come to our attention. The Center for Investigative Reporting, for example, publicized that a well-known white supremacist has received over \$1 million in bitcoin. Additionally, a review of several white supremacist websites, which contain links for bitcoin donations, confirms that extremists have turned to less regulated corners of finance in order to further their operations. In March of last year, a nationally known neo-Nazi tweeted that “Bitcoin is the currency of the alt right”. In light of these facts, it is clear that the corporate cryptocurrency community should take the necessary steps to deter these troubling activities.

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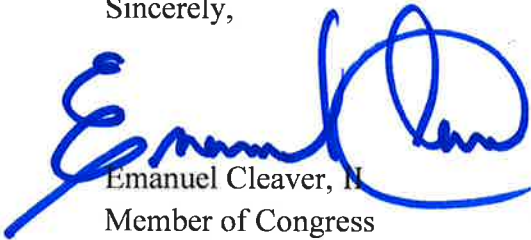
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I would like to know what steps your members are taking to ensure that the bitcoin services they provide are not being used to facilitate radical campaigns of abuse, harassment, and/or violence against Americans. As a member of Congress serving on the Financial Services Committee, I am concerned both that the bitcoin ecosystem may be providing a welcoming environment for the funding of campaigns of hatred and hostility, and that the movement of funds among anonymous white supremacist accounts will be increasingly difficult to monitor. I would be pleased to learn that your members are adopting terms of service that would result in restrictions or closure of accounts that facilitate such reprehensible uses, but, more importantly, I am eager to know where your organization stands.

Cryptocurrency is a technology with tremendous potential that should not be dismissed, and the opportunity it provides should not be stifled. The cryptocurrency movement is driving valuable technological innovation. However, it is clear that bitcoin, and related cryptocurrencies, will either mature as vehicles of tremendous social importance, or implore unnecessary intervention attributable to an inability to self-police its use by hate groups, terrorists, human traffickers, drug dealers, and other nefarious actors. It is my sincere hope that the bitcoin community is implementing responsible solutions to these matters of national concern and will look to seriously address any vulnerability that provides assistance to dangerous elements on crypto-platforms.

I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Emanuel Cleaver, II". The signature is stylized and fluid, with a large loop at the end.

Emanuel Cleaver, II
Member of Congress