The crypto bars are invading Washington

In a true sign of a vibe shift in Washington, a DC bar beloved by Republican staffers announced that it was shuttering its doors — and will reportedly be replaced by a bar that only accepts cryptocurrency as payment.

Local news site *PoPville* first reported on Thursday that a D.C. outpost of Pubkey, a bar located in Greenwich Village that describes itself as a "vibrant bitcoin community", had taken over the lease of Hill Country, a popular Texas barbecue restaurant and music venue, which recently announced it would close its doors in Penn Quarter after 14 years.

It's part of a trend of crypto-centric social venues opening up across the country in the past several years. Pubkey, which opened in 2022 near New York University's Manhattan campus, has a notably casual atmosphere: a subterranean dive bar-slash-podcast recording studio, with a pub grub menu designed by an Eleven Madison Park alum, where anyone could hang out — so long as they paid with cryptocurrency. (When Eater visited in 2022, they observed "a variety of regional styles" of hot dogs on the menu, as well as a stuffed raccoon next to "a television that appeared to be playing A Christmas Story".) But unlike its competitors, Pubkey has a unique link to the White House: Donald Trump made a high-profile visit during the 2024 campaign and used $998.70 worth of bitcoin to buy smash burgers for the entire bar, becoming the first president to conduct a bitcoin transaction — a symbolic embrace of the crypto community.

When reached for comment, Pubkey owner Thomas Pacchia confirmed that they would be opening a DC location in the

coming months, but declined to specify the location. “The DC location will have podcast studios, event space, all that stuff,” he told *The Verge*. Although he acknowledged the negative publicity surrounding Trump’s visit, Pacchia added that Democrats such as Rep. Ritchie Torres and Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand had visited Pubkey as well and hoped the new location would draw a bipartisan crowd. “Anybody that wants to come and talk about Bitcoin is welcome. Literally, anyone.”

The bar it will reportedly replace has diametrically opposed vibes. Located close to DC’s power lobbying firms, Hill Country, a bar whose decor could not scream “TEXAS” any louder, has long been known as a DC nightlife spot particularly beloved by Republican staffers looking for live country music, a good smoked brisket, and decently priced well liquor. It’s also a place where one could witness high-powered GOP lawmakers letting loose: Rep. George Santos was once spotted singing “I Will Survive” on a Wednesday karaoke night in 2023, while under a federal and Congressional investigation for fraud and lying about his background. (This reporter has personally attended several live karaoke nights and at least one company holiday party at Hill Country over the past several years.)

Pubkey’s arrival in Washington comes at a notable time in crypto’s history, whether it displaces the Republican bar or not. Once considered an unserious group of libertarians by lawmakers, the cryptocurrency community now has massive influence with the Trump administration, thanks to key crypto players such as David Sacks and Elon Musk supporting Trump’s reelection. Trump himself has embraced cryptocurrency more than previous presidents, launching his own memecoin, appointing Sacks as a “crypto czar” and announcing a potential cryptocurrency strategic reserve. (The rise of crypto has inadvertently stoked competition between the nativist MAGA right and the global economy-focused tech right, a tension so palpable that Vice President J.D. Vance recently had to call

for a truce between the two.) With the upcoming opening of Pubkey, it appears that in the nation’s capital, the crypto faction is literally gaining ground.

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