Facebook's Head of Ad Integrity Leaves Company

Facebook's chief of advertising integrity Rob Leathern has left the company, he announced in a Twitter thread Friday. Leathern came onboard shortly after President Donald Trump took office, and some of the social media giant's more contentious ad policies, including those regarding election and coronavirus misinformation, rolled out during his tenure.

Leathern disclosed his decision on an internal company network earlier this month, saying in a post reviewed by Reuters that he was "leaving Facebook to work on consumer privacy beyond just ads and social media" and his last day would be Dec. 30.

As the head of Facebook's product team for business integrity, which oversees promoted content on the platform, Leathern often acted as the public face for the company's political advertising policies. These policies have frequently come under fire over the last few years for not doing enough to fight the spread of election misinformation. In 2018, Facebook codified a loophole to let politicians effectively lie about their opponents in campaign ads, and then later tried to claim it made the decision to preserve "political discourse" rather than to blatantly profit off political misinformation.

More recently, the company agreed to temporarily disable political ads on its platform, but only *after* the polls closed for the 2020 presidential race. In November, Leathern said in a series of tweets that Facebook lacked "the technical ability in the short term to enable political ads by state or by advertiser," but roughly one month later the company lifted its political ad ban in Georgia ahead of the state's contentious run-off election on January 5 that will decide which party controls the Senate.

In a Twitter thread Friday evening, Leathern called his work at Facebook "difficult and demanding" at times, but said he was proud of what his colleagues had accomplished. He added that their work "makes a huge difference, often in ways the public doesn't see (& attracts criticism, which comes with having a lot of responsibility!)"

"Despite 2020's additional bubble of uncertainty, the teams I ran or influenced did a lot of very good work, including related to the US election where a lot of work was the culmination of a huge amount of effort over several years," he tweeted.

Leathern promised to reveal more details about his next professional venture in the coming weeks, saying only that he was "staying in the tech/data/privacy space" but wouldn't be working on ads directly.

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It's unclear exactly why Leathern parted ways with Facebook. He didn't offer any explanation in his Twitter thread beyond that it had been a "difficult decision." Facebook didn't immediately respond to Gizmodo's request for comment on the matter.