Chaffetz: Autonomous Cars, Drones, IoT on Oversight Committee's Agenda

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The House Oversight and Government Reform Committee will examine a range of tech and privacy issues during the 115th Congress, from drones and autonomous vehicles to law enforcement using facial recognition programs, Chairman Jason Chaffetz said Wednesday.

The Utah Republican, who spoke at a Cato Institute event in Washington, said Information Technology Subcommittee Chairman Will Hurd (R-Texas) is going to "spend a lot of time" on autonomous vehicles, and that the full committee would examine drones and the Internet of Things.

Chaffetz said the panel would also look into the proliferation of facial-recognition databases.

"Essentially one in two Americans is in a face-recognition, law-enforcement network," he said. "So the FBI, in particular, and others are doing everything it can to build out facial recognition with the goal, essentially, of having everybody's face in their database."

Chaffetz also announced the reintroduction of two measures regarding cell site simulators, or stingrays, that are often used by law enforcement agencies to track individuals. The device emits signals that mimic a cell tower and connects to a target's cellular device.

The GPS Act would require law enforcement to obtain a warrant to use a stingray to track an individual and impose a penalty for using the device without a probable cause warrant; and the Cell Location Privacy Act would make it illegal to use a stingray device, and punish someone who knowingly uses one without a warrant.

Chaffetz released a report in December with Oversight Committee ranking member Elijah Cummings (D-Md.) that showed the Justice Department has 310 stingray devices and has spent more than $71 million in fiscal years 2010-2014 on the technology, while the Department of Homeland Security spent $24 million in that time period and owns 124 stingray devices.