

# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

MAJORITY (202) 225-5074  
MINORITY (202) 225-5051

<http://oversight.house.gov>

### Opening Statement Ranking Member Elijah E. Cummings

#### Hearing on "Drones: The Next Generation of Commerce" June 17, 2015

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for calling this hearing. This is a really interesting hearing. Drones are an exciting new technology with a lot of potential uses in the not-so-distant future. Companies are developing new technologies to use drones to fight forest fires or deliver pizza.

However, Mr. Chairman, I share the same concerns as you and many other Americans. I want the use of drones to be safe, and I want to make sure that the privacy interests of the American people are protected.

As with any new, groundbreaking technology, our regulatory regime has not yet fully caught up with drones, and existing rules do not fully address the concerns Americans have. Our goal must be to balance these concerns in a way that allows for the robust development of these new technologies while ensuring that necessary safeguards are in place.

In 2014, there were more than 9.5 million commercial airline flights carrying more than 850 million passengers in the United States, according to the Bureau of Transportation Statistics. Our aviation system is among the safest in the world, and obviously we must ensure that drones do not imperil the operation of our commercial airliners.

Allowing drones to fly in the airspace used by commercial jets is a long-term aspiration rather than an imminent possibility.

However, although the FAA has approved only a small number of drones to operate in U.S. airspace, the Assistant Inspector General of the Department of Transportation has testified to Congress that airline crews have already reported seeing unmanned aircraft around airports, in some cases at altitudes above 2,000 feet.

Right now, there does not appear to be a proven technology to ensure that an unmanned aircraft can act on its own to identify and avoid other aircraft. There also does not appear to be a proven technology to ensure that radio links between drones and their operators are maintained consistently. This could cause drones to crash or, equally dangerous, fly out of control.

Our aviation system does not allow a wide margin of error. A system to manage drone traffic even at low altitudes is still in the very early stages of development and is not ready for deployment.

Recognizing the limits of existing technology, the FAA has proposed new regulations that would allow drones weighing less than 55 pounds to operate only during daylight hours, under 500 feet, and less than 100 miles per hour. These rules would also require that drones fly within the line-of-sight of their operators, who would be allowed to operate only one drone at a time.

The use of drones in U.S. airspace also raises significant privacy concerns. Drones have been used to gather a wide variety of film footage of people and property. They have been used to gather real-time data on the movements of people without those people even knowing the drones were present.

This data can be stored indefinitely, and it can be analyzed and integrated to create very detailed pictures of almost every aspect of a person's life. These possibilities raise a host of privacy concerns that have not been fully addressed by current law or legal precedent. Once it has been lost, privacy is not easily regained.

Successfully introducing drones into U.S. airspace will require all parties to strike a balance that threads numerous needles. I am confident that this can be achieved, but I am certain it will take time and thoughtful analysis.

I appreciate the opportunity to consider these issues today, and I look forward to the testimony of our witnesses.

---

Contact: Aryele Bradford, Deputy Communications Director, (202) 226-5181.