

House Republicans question telecoms on location tracking

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In this Feb. 15, 2017, file photo a hotel guest is dwarfed by the glass facade of the JW Marriott hotel as he looks at his phone on an escalator at the hotel in downtown Los Angeles. Several House Republicans are asking T-Mobile, AT&T, Verizon and Sprint how they share their users' cellphone location data, citing a recent report that telecoms are selling that information to shadowy companies without customer knowledge. (AP Photo/Jae C. Hong, File)

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how they share their users' cellphone location data, citing a recent report that telecoms are selling that information to shadowy companies without customer knowledge.

The lawmakers said Wednesday that they are troubled because it is not the first report of these types of data-sharing practices. They also sent questions to data brokers Zumigo and Microbilt, which were mentioned in last week's Motherboard report.

Democrats have also expressed concern, including calling for investigations and legislation. But Rep. Frank Pallone, D-N.J., the chairman of the House energy and commerce committee, said this week that because of the government shutdown, the Federal Communications Commission chairman would not brief House staff on what the agency plans to do about the issue.

An FCC spokesman said the agency will continue to investigate wireless carriers' handling of location information when its operations are back to normal.

AT&T and T-Mobile say they will stop selling all location data from mobile phones to brokers by March. Last year, the major carriers had already pledged to stop providing location information to data brokers. But AT&T and T-Mobile said they made an exception for useful services that, for instance, helped customers with roadside assistance or fraud protection. The companies say they will also end those location-sharing practices in March.

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