

It isn't exactly news that the U.S. Senate is an anti-majoritarian institution. The filibuster, which effectively allows 41 Senators to block action, gets a lot of attention. But much worse is the "hold," which lets a single senator stand in the way of a bill or nomination.

According to the [Senate's glossary](#), a hold is essentially an informal filibuster threat:

An informal practice by which a Senator informs his or her floor leader that he or she does not wish a particular bill or other measure to reach the floor for consideration. The Majority Leader need not follow the Senator's wishes, but is on notice that the opposing Senator may filibuster any motion to proceed to consider the measure.

Unfortunately, Senate etiquette means that holds are typically honored without forcing the objecting senator to back up the bluff. At least [holds can no longer be secret](#). Since obstructionism is the new governance, though, there seems to be little restraining the Republican Senate minority from exercising the public hold, and even crowing over it.

Here's the example that's currently got me exercised: [According to Politico](#), Sen. David Vitter (R. La.) has placed a hold on the nomination of [Dan Ashe](#) to be Director of the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Why? Because Vitter doesn't like the way the Interior Department is handling applications for offshore drilling permits. Vitter wants a quick return to the pre-Deepwater Horizon days of rubber-stamping those applications. He even has a number in mind — he won't release his hostages until Interior issues 15 permits.

What does offshore drilling have to do with Ashe or the position for which he is nominated? Nothing. The Fish and Wildlife Service is responsible for managing the National Wildlife Refuge system and for implementing the Endangered Species Act. It has not had any role in the temporary exploratory drilling moratorium, in the reorganization of the former Minerals Management Service, or in the issuance of new deepwater drilling rules. Nor has Ashe, who is currently Deputy Director of FWS, been involved in those events.

Of course that's irrelevant to Vitter, who is simply throwing a tantrum. He's also blocking the nomination of [Scott Doney](#), a research scientist at the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, to be Chief Scientist at NOAA.

Where are the adults in the Senate? It's time for the leadership to grow up, send Vitter to his room, and get on about the people's business. If there's a legitimate objection to Ashe or Doney, let it be publicly aired and then put the nominations to a vote.

