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## End the Senate's secret holds

BY THE TH EDITORIAL BOARD

### where we stand

If U.S. senators want to delay a nomination or certain legislation, they should publicly disclose why.

The wheels of Washington can turn incredibly slowly -- even when elected officials are trying to get something done. But the foot-dragging in the U.S. Senate seems to be worse than ever.

This spring there were as many as 290 bills OK'd by the House that were awaiting Senate action. That's partly because the Senate is hamstrung by rules of its own making, like the filibuster -- which permits extended debate on an issue to the point that it is used as a blocking maneuver.

An even more dubious stalling tactic has come in vogue in the Senate of late. This is the policy known as the "secret hold." By this procedure, one senator may put the brakes on a piece of legislation or a pending nomination. The senator placing the hold doesn't have to say why. And his or her reasoning doesn't have to have any relevance to the measure itself. In many cases, senators don't even know who has placed the item on hold -- hence the secret.

Technically, that's against the rules. Members of the Senate are supposed to have six days to publicly disclose their holds. Only no one really follows that rule. Sometimes a hold might be transferred from one senator to another after five days, just to get around the rule. That's called "hold laundering." As of midweek, there were 53 nominations being blocked with secret holds.

Sound ridiculous? It is. Even the Senate agrees. It was just a few years ago that the six-day rule was put in place in an attempt to stop the secret hold. But, as one might expect, the politicians found their ways around the new rule.

If you know much about Sen. Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa, you know that this is his kind of issue. Grassley has for years worked on rules to end the practice. Right now, he's working on an amendment to attach to the financial reform bill that would change the hold disclosure rule from six days to two. That's a good start. Enforcement should be a piece of it as well. There is apparently no penalty for disobeying the hold disclosure rule. Violation of that rule should have some impact on a senator's ability to make future holds.

The Senate doesn't need any more tricks or tools to hold up legislation. If senators have legitimate reasons for placing holds, let them say so -- in public.

Let's hope that Grassley prevails in his effort to remove some of the secrecy -- and perhaps a little lethargy -- from this Senate institution.

Editorials reflect the consensus of the Telegraph Herald Editorial Board.