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Idaho Senators Block ATF Pick

By MATTHEW DALY – 2 days ago

WASHINGTON (AP) — Idaho's senators are blocking President Bush's nominee for the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, saying the agency has become overly aggressive in enforcing gun laws.

Republican Sens. Larry Craig and Mike Crapo placed separate holds on the nomination of federal prosecutor Michael Sullivan, the acting ATF director for more than a year.

Crapo's spokesman, Lindsay Nothern, said the senator's office has heard from a number of gun dealers, gun owners and others in Idaho who "have concerns about ATF regarding gun sales and even (gun) ownership. Maybe the federal government is a little too aggressive with people who haven't done anything wrong."

Sullivan, who also serves as U.S. attorney in Massachusetts, was nominated by President George W. Bush in March. The Senate Judiciary Committee approved his nomination last month.

Under Senate rules, a single senator, sometimes anonymously, can put a hold on a nomination of legislative action for months.

The ATF had no immediate comment Wednesday.

Crapo met with Sullivan last week and "had some pointed questions," Nothern said. The senator is still waiting for answers, Nothern said.

Sidney Smith, a spokesman for Craig, said the senator's intention "was not to throw up a permanent roadblock. We were hearing concerns from people in our state about ATF was working with law-abiding gun dealers on compliance issues."

Craig also met with Sullivan and awaits answers to his questions, Smith said.

The action comes as an Idaho gun shop wages a high-profile battle with the ATF over the right to buy and trade guns.

The ATF stripped the license of Red's Trading Post, in Twin Falls, Idaho, in March after an audit found numerous record-keeping violations over a five-year period.

A federal judge later ruled the agency had exaggerated and omitted some of the evidence it used to revoke the license. U.S. District Judge Edward Lodge allowed the gun store to continue operating until he decides whether the license revocation was legal. The case is still pending.

Sullivan, a former GOP state legislator, has been known for a tough stance on gun cases in his tenure as U.S. attorney. One judge criticized him publicly for burdening the federal system with cases that could be handled by state prosecutors.

Associated Press writer Andrew Miga contributed to this report.