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The Other Blumenthal Scandal

Vietnam deception reflects his public character.

Richard Blumenthal, the Democratic Senatorial candidate from Connecticut, is in trouble this week for lying about having fought in Vietnam. The former Marine reservist admits he "misspoke" on several occasions about his military service and is otherwise unapologetic, but the revelation has thrown open a race that Mr. Blumenthal appeared to have in the bag.

Since Connecticut voters are suddenly focused on Mr. Blumenthal's résumé, they might also like to learn more about his record in public life. Since 1991, Mr. Blumenthal has been the Nutmeg State's Attorney General, earning a reputation for aggressive, politically tinged and high-profile prosecutions. He has accused hundreds of people and businesses of misrepresentation and fraud that is often less egregious than his own untruthful claims.

Mr. Blumenthal has made his crusading ways a large selling point in his bid to replace the retiring Chris Dodd. The state press generally goes along. He deflects criticism that his methods scare investors and jobs away from the state, and he even says that his prosecutions bring in revenue by coercing fines out of companies.

"To blame law enforcement for unemployment is beyond wrong, it's silly and shouldn't be given any credibility," he said earlier this year. One of his Democratic opponents, Merrick Alpert, cracked in response that, "Lawsuits don't create jobs,

entrepreneurs create jobs."


To understand the Blumenthal method, consider his case against Gina Kolb, formerly Gina Malapanis, and her small computer supplies company, Computers Plus Center Inc. In 2003, the Attorney General alleged that Computers Plus had failed to install proper "network interface cards" in the machines it supplied under a \$17.2 million state contract, which was cancelled.

Mr. Blumenthal first filed a civil suit against Computers Plus for \$1.7 million—announced, of course, at a press conference featuring himself. "No supplier should be permitted to shortchange or overcharge the state without severe consequences," he said then. The following year, the state escalated with a criminal case and police arrested Mrs. Kolb at her home on seven first-degree larceny charges punishable by up to 20 years in jail. More toughly worded press releases followed from the prosecutor.

Mrs. Kolb refused to take a plea in the civil case. On the criminal charges, she took part in the state's accelerated rehabilitation program. She didn't admit guilt, and upon completion of the program her record was wiped clean in 2008. Mrs. Kolb countersued the state for violating her constitutional rights, abusing its power and ruining her business. This January, a jury agreed that Mr. Blumenthal made false claims about Mrs. Kolb and her business, awarding her \$18 million.

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So much for Mr. Blumenthal making money for Connecticut taxpayers.

The AG has challenged the verdict, but the Kolb case fits a pattern that the Cato Institute's Walter Olson calls "bullying, legally ill-founded ventures into litigation." From his leading role in the tobacco lawsuits of the 1990s to trying to repossess bonuses to AIG executives, Mr. Blumenthal has cultivated a reputation as the Eliot Spitzer of Connecticut. In 2007, the Competitive Enterprise Institute rated Mr. Blumenthal the worst state AG, beating Mr. Spitzer, which takes some doing.

He was the only AG to get failing grades in each of the four categories: using his office to "promote personal gain or enrich cronies or relatives"; "fabricating the law" by asking courts to "rewrite statutes or stretch constitutional norms"; bringing lawsuits "that usurp regulatory powers granted to the federal government or other state entities"; and "seeking to regulate conduct occurring wholly in other states."

Which does not mean Mr. Blumenthal can't show prosecutorial discretion when he wants to. Last year, he went on television to announce that he wouldn't investigate Countrywide Financial's sweetheart loans to Senator Dodd, nonetheless declaring without any probe that "there's no evidence of wrongdoing on [Mr. Dodd's] part."

Much like Mr. Spitzer's cavorting with prostitutes while he was New York's chief law enforcement officer, Mr. Blumenthal's Vietnam fabrications reflect a larger problem with his public character. Rather than apologize for imagining a war record, the AG copped only to "a few misplaced words" that he said were "totally unintentional"—and he even held his news conference at a Veterans of Foreign Wars hall.

Mr. Blumenthal's Vietnam problem is all too typical of a sense of entitlement and impunity that has built up over many years of exercising vast power with little restraint. This is not the kind of character that will change Washington.