

VFW Demands an Apology from Blumenthal

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ROCKY HILL, Conn. — The department commander of Connecticut's largest war veterans' organization is demanding an apology from state Attorney General Richard Blumenthal for claiming he was a Vietnam veteran when he is not.

"Only those who served in Vietnam or offshore or in neighboring countries can rightfully call themselves a Vietnam veteran," said Richard G. DiFederico, department commander for the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S.

"Mr. Blumenthal is not a Vietnam veteran, and whether he misspoke, was misquoted or regrets that some people believed he was a veteran of that war is not the issue," said DiFederico, of Oakville. "The issue is about the top law enforcement officer in my state — someone whose very position requires higher standards of personal integrity and accountability — who won't apologize to those he has deeply offended."

Press reports earlier this week confirmed that Blumenthal, a Vietnam Era veteran who served honorably in the Marine Corps Reserve, alluded to being a Vietnam veteran on several public occasions. He is currently running as a democratic candidate to replace retiring U.S. Sen. Christopher Dodd (D-Conn.).

On Tuesday, the West Hartford mayor arranged for the democratic campaign committee to rent the meeting hall inside VFW Post 9929 for a press conference, which at the time many believed was the perfect venue for Blumenthal to issue a public apology to all Vietnam veterans. Instead of apologizing, he became defiant, and launched into full campaign mode to defend his record as a public servant.

"This issue isn't about Mr. Blumenthal's great service to the state's veteran and military population, it's about him refusing to apologize for claiming to be something he is not," said DiFederico, who served in the Navy as a member of the 1983 multinational peacekeeping force in Beirut, Lebanon.

The VFW department commander said Blumenthal needs to apologize to the 3.4 million servicemen and women who served honorably in Southeast Asia, as well as to 5.3 million

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Vietnam Era veterans who served honorably elsewhere. But ultimately, DiFederico said, Blumenthal must apologize to Connecticut's quarter-million veterans, military and their family members.

"The attorney general was considered one of the best friends a veteran could have in our state. It is a true shame that he let a false claim of Vietnam service change all that.