

A place to be heard

TOWN SQUARE

YOUR VIEW

Have you heard about the political candidate who said ... ?

Richard Blumenthal, the Connecticut attorney general and Democratic candidate for Senate, recently admitted that he had "misspoken" when questions arose about the exact nature of his military record. On numerous occasions, according to one investigation, Blumenthal spoke of having "served in Vietnam," when in fact he meant to say that he had served (in the Marine Reserve) during the Vietnam War. Of course this was only an innocent mistake; a misinterpretation, a misstatement, a misunderstanding.

Indeed, political candidates are often misunderstood. Under such circumstances, the truth often sits in the semantic space between what they "meant to say" and what they really hope that you heard. Parsing campaign-speak with such care has always been a pastime for political junkies; fortunately (or was it unfortunately?) today's wired world and 24-hour news cycle supply us with a steady stream of instances where candidates ultimately concede to have been "misunderspoken."

Here are some you might have missed so far during this electoral season:

A candidate for governor of a western state offered the following: "I was recently in high-level trade talks with the Chinese," by which he actually meant: "I ordered dinner last night at Wang's Express, top



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Connecticut Attorney General and Senate candidate Richard Blumenthal embraces Peter Galgano, left, of the Marine Corps League of Connecticut at a May news conference.

floor of the Holiday Inn. The owner is in my fantasy baseball league."

And then there was the candidate for school board in a New Jersey hamlet who bragged that he "once saw Bruce Springsteen at a party" and was "on a first-name basis with him," which is true, in a sense, except that the "party" had 65,000 people in attendance, you had to pay \$150 and bring along a small rectangular piece of paper to get in, and just about everyone was yelling

"Bruce!"

Around the same time, an individual running for attorney general of a New England state sought to insulate himself against questions about his scant experience for the job by insisting that he "went to Harvard Law School." When pressed on the matter, he was forced to admit that, while he had "gone" there it was only to buy a sweatshirt and ask for directions.

Down south a woman was running for

sheriff, stressing her "tough on crime" credentials, and bragging about "collaring" hundreds of men. Reporters digging into her biography found that she was presently working as a seamstress.

In a Midwestern state, a town council candidate sought to ingratiate himself with the coffee shop crowd by recounting stories from his time playing in the "World Series"—the "World Series of Poker," it turns out. His challenger took a page from the same playbook, pointing to his "Super Bowl" experience. Yup, turned out it was just "Madden 2010."

Or there was the heated race for state historian in a northeastern community that led to some "misunderspeaking." One candidate assured a crowd of local blue bloods that her ancestors "fought for freedom during the Civil War" (actually her great, great, great-grandfather had simply tried to break out of prison in 1862—in Holland!), while another claimed to have family members who "came over on the Mayflower" (his sister had just moved to Long Island with ... you guessed it, Mayflower Van Lines).

"Misunderstatements" are everywhere around us. Perhaps the best defense as a citizen is to keep ears attuned and eyes trained in the processing of information. Don't believe everything you read.

Are the above examples real or imaginary? Is truth stranger than fiction? It depends on what the definition of "is," is.

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