Rochester area candidates must pledge to fight fair

Aug. 13   democratandchronicle.com

Tuesday marked the formal kick-off of the local Fair Elections Practices campaign, an effort to maintain above-board campaigning that recent history shows is much-needed. Candidates for local office should waste no time affixing their names to the Fair Campaign Pledge.

Organizers from the local League of Women Voters and the Interfaith Alliance of Rochester, which select members to the Fair Elections Practices Committee, have been holding candidates' feet to the fairness fire for decades. Still, they say they'll be happy if as many as half of the more than 140 candidates in area races sign the pledge. Local office-seekers can do better than that, and should.

One need look only as far back as last fall to see the need for third-party assessments of local campaigns. Ads in the state Senate race between Ted O'Brien and Sean Hanna, and the congressional contest between Rep. Louise Slaughter and Monroe County Executive Maggie Brooks generated numerous complaints to the Fair Elections committee, which ruled that several were over the line.

With some $10 million spent last year in area campaigns by candidates, political parties and outside groups, there is the potential for much misleading information. All the more reason local hopefuls should pledge to keep their own campaigns on the high road, and repudiate outside advertising deemed unfair.

For its part, the elections committee should take a closer look at how to incorporate social media more formally into its pledge. As the use of Facebook, Twitter and other electronic means of high-tech politicking play more prominent roles in current campaigns, the potential for misinformation likewise increases.

A public pledge ceremony is planned for Sept. 3 at the Monroe County Office Building. There's no reason for any candidate to not have signed on by then. And voters should weigh a campaigner's willingness to pledge a fair fight when casting their ballots.