

Fair Elections Practices Committee to review ads

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The unfortunate reality of political campaigns is that sometimes candidates and outside groups are not entirely honest.

The Rochester-area League of Women Voters and the Interfaith Alliance of Rochester believe that they've made a small dent in the number of lies and misrepresentations on the campaign trail through the Fair Elections Practices Committee, which reviews and makes decisions on claims in campaign literature each year. Officials from both organizations discussed the effort Monday with the *Democrat and Chronicle* editorial board.

As candidates for local [office](#)

[line up](#), the committee has again formed. A panel of two Republicans, two Democrats and a nonvoting chair will field complaints from candidates who think false claims have been made by their opponents.

Candidates are being asked to sign the Fair Elections Practices Pledge, where they will agree to conduct their campaign accurately and honestly, not engage in character attacks, to approve all materials concerning their campaign, and to repudiate any unfair ads by third parties.

New this year, the candidates are also pledging not to use the word "guilty" to describe a decision against their opponents.

"We have no power beyond bringing people's attention to the fact of what occurred, and hopefully having the newspaper publish it," said Bob Herman, secretary and board [member](#)

[for the alliance](#). "As a result of that things are far better than they would have been, but this is far from perfection and there isn't a time when we go through this that we don't learn some new facet and fine tune something."

Candidates were asked to sign the pledge last week, and the league wants them to sign by Aug. 28. There will be a signing ceremony Sept. 3.

So far, seven candidates have signed the pledge: Chili Town Clerk Virginia Ignatowski, Greece Supervisor candidate Bill Reilich, Mendon Supervisor John Moffitt, Mendon Town Clerk James Merzke, Mendon Town Board candidate Cynthia Carroll, Riga Town Clerk Kimberly Pape and Rochester City Councilwoman Jackie Ortiz.

Both Rochester Mayor Thomas Richards, and his challenger in the Democratic primary, City Council President Lovely Warren, plan on signing, spokespeople for the respective campaigns said Monday.

Even though the four [members](#)

[of the panel](#) are partisan, all but one decision in the committee's history has been unanimous, Herman said.

“Almost everyone (on the panel) has held office, and has campaigned and gone through this process themselves. As a result of that, you get a sense of what’s important, what isn’t important, how close you are cutting it to the line, and there is a point at which you are at the edge, and a decision has to be made: Did you go over the line?” Herman said.

Katherine Smith, advocacy chair for the local league, said this year many candidates are unopposed, but she hopes they will sign the pledge as well.

“It’s a huge issue, and if you’re not there every year, if you’re not doing it all the time, then you can’t maintain your standard.”