

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dr. Gerard C. Penta

No judges approval system is perfect, so none should be cast in stone. While it is frustrating to deal with an approval process that often appears to be in a constant state of flux, still, it is worthwhile to seek changes which clearly improve the process. Too often though, when it comes to the judging approval process, changes are not improvements but expressions of political necessity, clerical expediency or administrative impulse. Nevertheless, a periodic, thoughtful, reassessment of the entire process as it relates to its goals and various constituencies can be a good thing.

As you know by now, the AKC has appointed a committee to review and revise the judging approval process. The committee is chaired by AKC Board Member, Dr. Robert Smith and includes a number of other competent and well known individuals. Although this is a group of capable people, some concerns have been raised regarding the composition of this committee. Not all of the concerns that have been raised are legitimate, however, there are a couple which have merit. Please understand, these concerns are not critical of those people who have been included on the committee, but rather, elements of the sport which have been omitted from the committee.

The first, and most glaring omission, is the absence of any representatives from the judges' organizations. None of the appointed committee members are there to represent the judging community. This should come as no surprise, as the AKC has often made this type of mistake in the past. Nonetheless, one would hope that at some point, the AKC would learn from their many past missteps.

The second criticism is closely related to the first. That is, if the committee is not going to have representatives of the judging community, it should at least include a couple of typical judges attempting to advance under the current approval system. As a famous American philosopher once wrote, "He who wears the shoe knows best where it pinches".

To seemingly ignore the very community most affected by the approval process is to undermine the credibility of the committees' work at the outset. It may tarnish the product of their deliberations and lead to unnecessary controversy over any new process they may create. The good people who have agreed to give of their time and effort to participate on this committee deserve better. They should not have to

start out with one strike against them. But then, a great deal of work must have gone into the Petland project, the group realignment committee, and the annual fee for judges proposal. The squandering of talent and effort on failed projects formulated on a "we know best" attitude is nothing new at the AKC.

This cloister mentality deprives the AKC of valuable input at the developmental stage of policy creation. Ego investment in the product makes it difficult for the developers of a new policy to revise the policy when confronted with criticism. Sometimes the lack of representation during the developmental process results in elements of the new policy which are so distasteful to some segments of the broader community as to cause an over reaction. The entire concept and central purpose of the new policy is then discarded. The end result--zero progress.

Someday the AKC may learn to be more inclusive in such matters, but while we wait, we should try to be supportive of this new committee in any way we can. After all, I am certain they have the best of intentions and we may have to live with what they produce if their recommendations are approved by the AKC Board. We can hope that the committee itself will seek the judging community's thoughts prior to finalizing its proposal. If so, each of us should be ready with suggestions based on our own thoughts and experiences and keeping in mind what is best for the dog show world.