

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dr. Gerard C. Penta

As you know the new approval process was passed by the AKC Board at their June, 2015 meeting on a seven to four vote with two abstentions. The ADSJ has been arguing against this approval process and its underlying premise for many years. The policy has a number of positive features designed to appeal to a large number of judges and prospective judges, but at its core it is a serious threat to our sport and the protection and preservation of our breeds.

The central premise this policy rests upon was made explicit in the body of the final proposal. The author clearly states this foundational belief under section **2) Judge's Breed Commentary**, where we find this statement, ".....there is no right or wrong due to the subjective nature of judging through one's interpretation." Herein lies the crux of the problem. The assumption that judging is essentially, and perhaps exclusively, subjective has always been implicit in this approval policy.

This premise is wrong. Every judge with any experience knows it is wrong. Every breeder knows it is wrong. Every handler knows it is wrong. The entire history and culture of the dog show world is testament to the fact that this premise is wrong.

Judging dogs is, and has always been, more than merely a subjective exercise. A round eye is not an almond eye, a soft coat is not a wire coat, a splay foot is not a cat foot, a level bite is not a scissors bite, etc., etc. etc. These and other physical traits, the descriptions of which constitute a breed standard, are objective entities not dependent upon the subjective interpretation of the judge.

Obviously there is an important subjective element involved in judging dogs without which we could just "mail it in". There are many subtle differences in style within a

breed and judges do have subjective preferences which express themselves in different placements from one day to the next. However, these subjective elements should never outweigh the objective superiority of one dog over another. Once the objectively superior dogs have been moved to the head of the class, it is then that the role of subjective preferences takes center stage. This may legitimately account for the differences in placements among the better dogs as adjudicated by different judges. However, the placement of objectively poor specimens over objectively superior specimens is never defensible on the grounds of one's subjective interpretation of the standard.

Given the above, it is both possible and desirable to evaluate judges on their performance as part of any reasonable approval process. Not to the extent that we deny the legitimate role of a judge's subjectivity, (i.e. by trying to nit pick between placements or Winners and Reserve from ringside), but rather, to simply determine that the objectively superior dogs are at the front of the class, indicating that the judge has a grasp of the important objective features central to the breed's type.

The approval process we are now saddled with clearly denies the possibility of such evaluation, claiming that it is all subjective and hence it follows that all opinions are equally valid.

Every intellectually honest dog show person knows that this is utter nonsense. The acceptance of such a premise gives cover and comfort to the incompetent, strips away the very rationale for breed standards, shreds the efforts of serious breeders, makes a mockery of judges education, and could eventually lead to the demise of the purebred dog in America.

The only bright spot in the passage of this approval process is the fact that it was not unanimously approved by the AKC Board. Four AKC Board members had the courage to vote against the proposal. On this vote alone, these

four, William Feeney, Patricia Cruz, Dr. Charles Garvin and Harvey Wooding deserve our thanks. Both Bill Feeney and Pat Cruz are up for reelection. Please ask your delegate to support them and any other candidate that might help repeal this mindless policy.

With luck the delegate body will awaken from its slumber and rise up to protect the sport. We can only hope. Speaking of sleeping on the job, where is the outrage on the part of the Parent Clubs? After all, it is the very preservation and protection of our breeds that may be at stake. \*