

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dr. Gerard C. Penta

An annual fee for judges. That is precisely what the AKC Board hopes to approve and implement in the near future. It is a topic that has been raised from time to time over most of this decade by AKC representatives at our ADSJ/AKC Liaison Committee meetings. While we are opposed to such fees, we have taken the position that we might not have a problem with a nominal annual fee, if the AKC would give judges something in return. For example, we suggested an AKC Judge identification card which might be used to gain admittance to AKC dog shows and other events run by cooperating kennel clubs.

During these discussions it became clear that, while we were thinking in terms of tens of dollars, the AKC representatives were thinking in terms of hundreds of dollars. Obviously, we would not support an annual fee in the range they had in mind.

Nonetheless, the current Board seems intent on passing some sort of annual fee for judges. At this time, it is not clear just what form the proposed fee will take. Here are some of the alternatives that have been mentioned whenever this topic has been broached.

**A Sliding Scale of Fees:** One type, based on the number of breeds one is approved to judge, would result in the single breed judge having the lowest fee and all-breed judges paying the highest fee. A scale based on the number of groups one may judge would be similar in outcome. However, some all-breed judges may not judge as often as some multi-group judges, and yet they would still pay more than their more active colleagues. Also, it could be argued that the all-breed judges cost the Judging Operations Department the least and the judges with the least breeds cost the most. So, such a fee is not truly designed to have each person help offset part of what they cost the AKC.

A variation on this approach, and perhaps closer to expressing the underlying assumption behind a sliding scale (which is akin to an income tax) is a fee structure based on the number of shows at which one adjudicates in a year. Of course, given the range of judging fees charged by judges it may well be that a slightly less active, but more expensive judge, may earn more in one year than the busier but less expensive judge. So even this option does not quite achieve the income tax ideal the Board seems to have in mind. Also, the AKC may not wish to get involved in the tracking, record keeping and accounting which such fee scales require.

**A Flat Fee:** This seems simple enough. But if it is substantially more than the nominal fee we

suggested, how will the majority of judges react when they are charged as much as a judge who does a hundred or more shows per year? Judges with less than a group will be hard pressed to pass on this added expense.

What about delegate judges? Will they be charged like all other judges, or will they be exempted from an annual fee? The AKC Board should not think they can pacify the delegate judges by exempting them from an annual fee. Most delegate judges do not plan to be delegates forever, but they do plan to continue their judging careers.

If delegate judges are exempted, then it will be clear that the fee, whether a flat fee or a sliding scale, is a tax which the AKC Board expects to be passed on in the form of higher judging fees. Now some may think that the non-judge delegates will not mind if judges are charged a substantial annual fee. Indeed a few dullards, having been influenced by some of the anti-judge elements in our sport, may actually cheer the passage of a stiff annual fee for judges. However, most delegates are sharp as a tack when it comes to policy ramifications that negatively impact their club's financial well being. They will realize that this is an indirect increase in their club's costs which they, like the judges, will be forced to absorb or pass on. Also, many delegates are exhibitors who will ultimately be the ones who pay these annual fees. Remember, "corporations don't pay taxes, consumers do", and in this case the exhibitor is the consumer.

It's true that the AKC Board does not need the delegates' approval to charge a fee to judges, regardless of the amount of the fee. Yet, I doubt the Board really wants to antagonize the majority of the delegate body. When you combine the number of delegate judges with those non-judge delegates who realize that an annual fee for judges is not in the best interest of their clubs or themselves, I believe the great majority of delegates will be opposed to the idea.

In essence, an annual judges fee is a way for the AKC Board to conscript their judges into service as AKC tax collectors. It is a very bad idea in more ways than I have the time or space to recount.

Finally, this proposed fee is most disappointing because it is a sign of our confused response to the challenge of falling registrations. Do we really believe that feeding upon ourselves is the best way to confront those forces aligned against us?