

# Boy Scouts' charter in question

Legislation was drawn from concern about the group excluding homosexuals.

By Jim Abrams  
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

WASHINGTON, D.C. — A small group of House lawmakers charging that the Boy Scouts' policy toward gays was a badge of intolerance moved yesterday to repeal the organization's federal charter.

The legislation was another challenge to the long-standing relationship between the Boy Scouts and the federal government rising out of the group's stance on excluding homosexuals.

A vote on the bill, expected to be easily defeated, was likely to take place tomorrow.

The bill's chief sponsor, Rep. Lynn Woolsey, D-Calif., said she was a Girl Scout and one of her sons was a Boy Scout.

"We're not saying the Boy Scouts are bad; we're saying that intolerance is bad," she said in introducing the measure earlier this summer.

"We're disappointed that this bill would even be considered," countered Boy Scouts spokesman Gregg Shields.

He said having a federal charter is an honor and "we hope to continue to live up to that honor."

Republicans were quick to condemn the

bill and its Democratic supporters.

"Election-year pandering on an issue so radical and anti-American is an insult to families, Scouts and the country," said Rep. J.C. Watts of Oklahoma, the fourth-ranking House Republican.

"I scheduled this bill to demonstrate the lack of support for those who have declared open season on the Boy Scouts," said House Majority Leader Dick Armey, R-Texas.

The Boy Scouts of America got its federal charter in 1916, six years after it was founded.

It is one of about 90 groups with such designation, an honorary title given to patriotic, charitable and education organizations.

While it confers no specific benefits, receiving a federal charter is a mark of prestige and national recognition for a group.

Among other groups with federal charters like the Boy Scouts are the American Legion, Future Farmers of America, the National Tropical Botanical Garden and the National Ski Patrol.

The Supreme Court in a 5-4 decision in June, upheld the Boy Scouts' ban on homosexuals serving as troop leaders.

That ruling may also give legal backing to the 6.2 million-member organization's rejection of gay youths as members.

The Scouts asserted that homosexual conduct is inconsistent with the values it seeks to instill.

Although the high court sided with the group's First Amendment rights to "express-

sive association," the Boy Scout relationship with the federal government was brought into question by President Clinton.

Five days before the ruling, the president issued an executive order barring discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in federally conducted education and training programs.

The Interior Department in August asked the Justice Department for guidance on how that order affected the holding of Boy Scout Jamborees on federal lands.

GOP presidential nominee George W. Bush and other Republicans quickly accused the administration of trying to throw the scouts off federal lands.

But Attorney General Janet Reno, in a statement this month, said the tradition of Boy Scouts using federal lands for camping and other activities could continue.

Woolsey has also urged Clinton to resign as honorary president of the Boy Scouts because of the policy toward gays.

Her office said the White House has not responded to that request.

Shields said every president since Taft has served as honorary president.

After the June Supreme Court ruling, Clinton said he is "generally against discrimination against gays."

But he refused to criticize the Scouts or the court's ruling.

"The Boy Scouts still are — they're a great group.

They do a lot of good."

# United States forgives Bangladesh's payments

Bangladesh is the first country to cut U.S. debt to provide funding for forests.

By Jeannine Aversa  
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The United States is canceling a portion of Bangladesh's debt and allowing future interest payments to go into a fund that supports tropical forest conservation efforts.

The agreement will cancel some debt payments and save Bangladesh more than \$10 million over the next 18 years, the U.S. Treasury Department announced yesterday.

Bangladesh is the first country to benefit from legislation passed by Congress and signed into law by President Clinton in 1998 that provides certain countries the opportunity to reduce some of the debt they owe to the United States and generate funds for tropical forest conservation activities, the Treasury Department said.

The agreement reflects a "commitment to protect biodiversity and tropical forests around the world," said Treasury's Deputy

Secretary Stuart Eizenstat. Bangladesh, over the next 18 years, will have an estimated \$8.5 million in the tropical forest conservation fund, Treasury said.

That would result from interest payments on remaining debt being deposited into the fund rather than being paid to the United States.

"Most of the countries that possess many of the world's fragile rain forests are under heavy financial pressure to turn their rain forests into quick cash to meet their immediate domestic needs," said Sen. Joseph Biden, D-Del., who helped write the law.


The fund will be overseen by a board whose members will include one U.S. government representative.

A Bangladeshi government representative and members of the Bangladeshi public such as environmentalists, community members, scientists or forestry experts will also help oversee the program.

Bangladesh's tropical forests cover about 3.7 million acres.

Roughly half of this tropical forest is in the southwestern Sunderbans region. This area is considered to be the biggest habitat in the world for rare Bengal tigers.

The Clinton administration is discussing similar arrangements to forgive debt payments with Belize and El Salvador, the Treasury Department said.



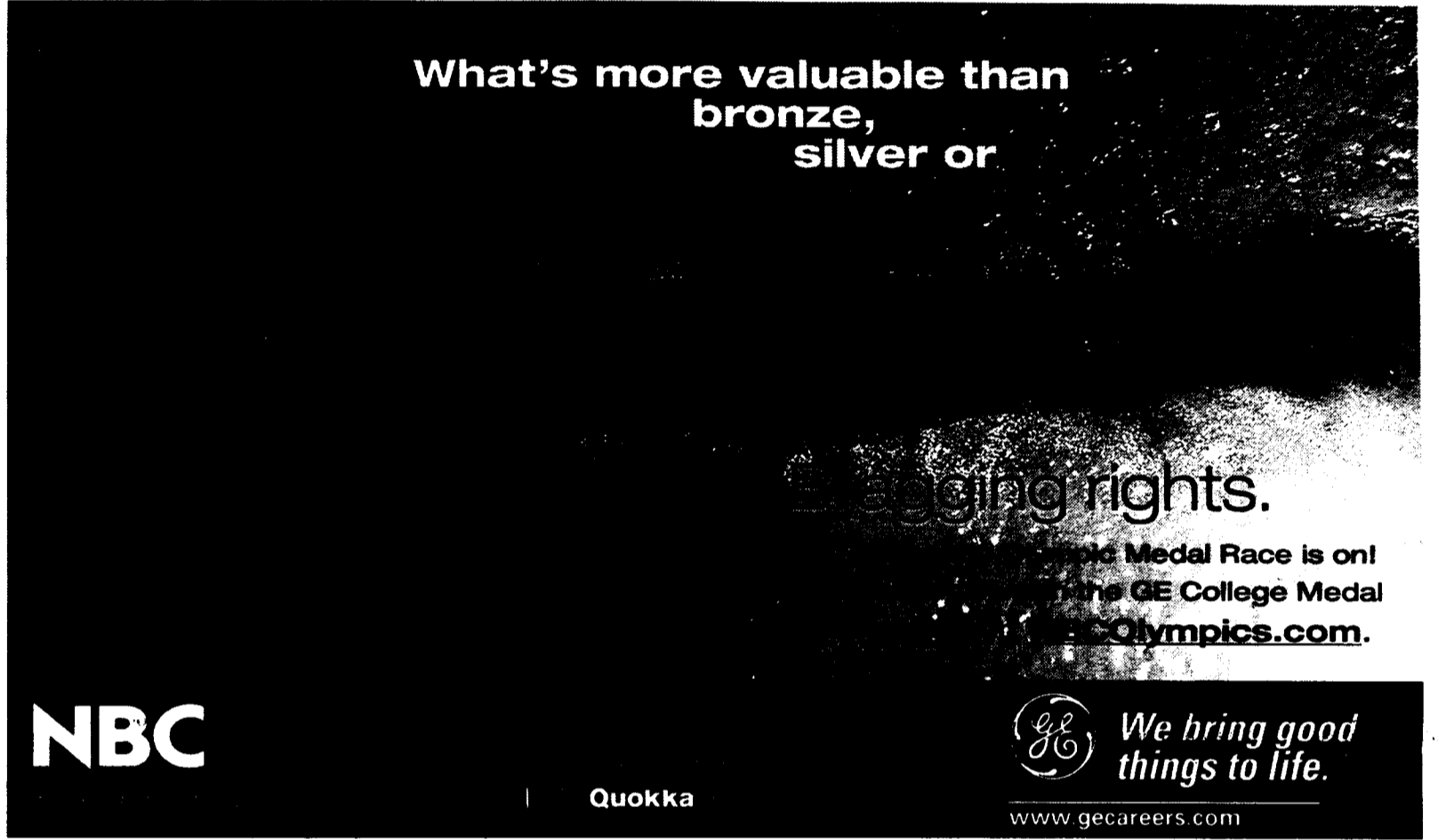
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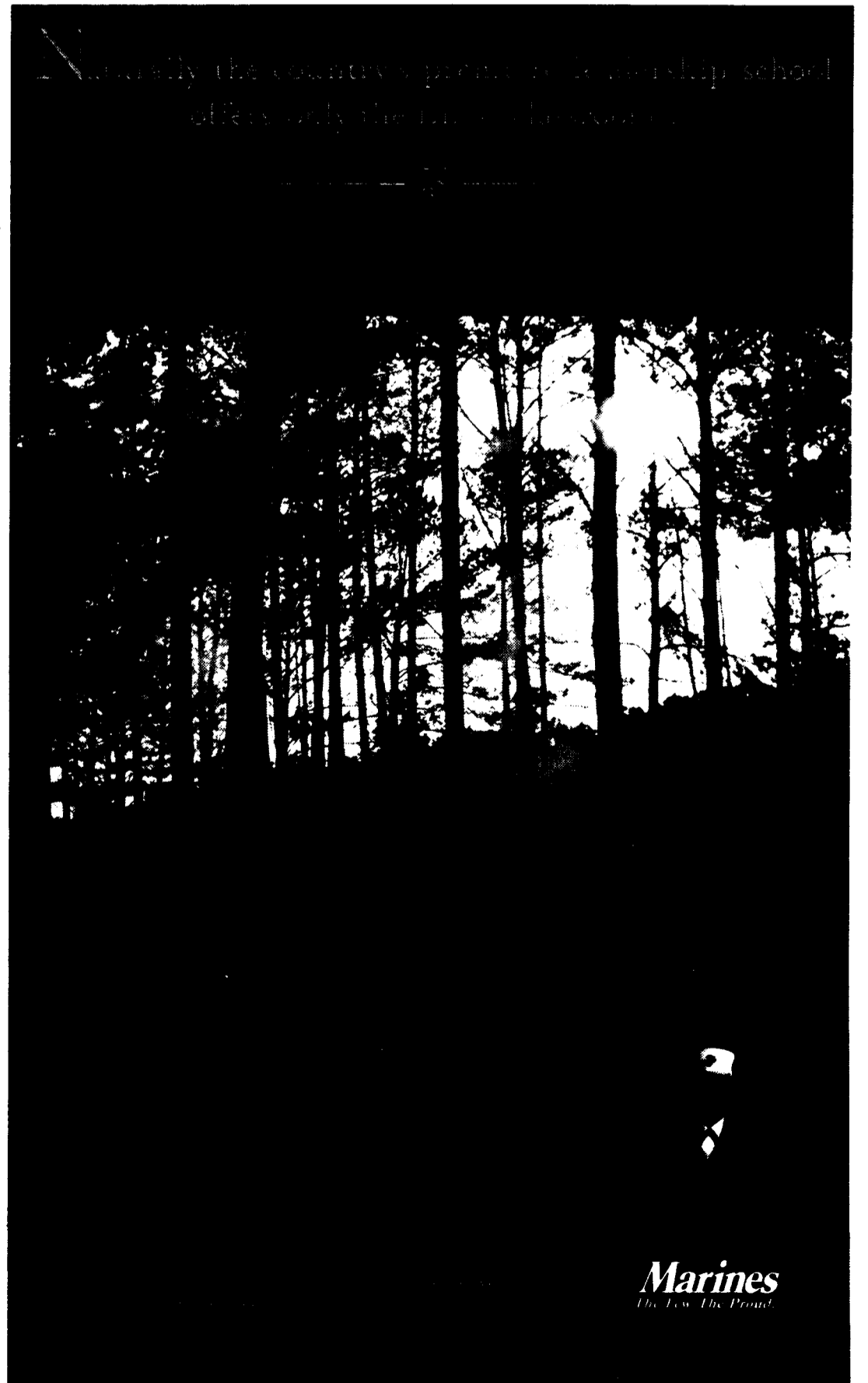


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