

NATIONAL news

ened by violence, and 17 percent had experienced physical attack."

The Human Rights Campaign praised the U.S. Agriculture Department on June 20 for its new effort to hire program specialists to foster workplace diversity, including a specialist to handle gay and lesbian issues. It is the first time a U.S. administration has sought to hire a specialist to handle such issues in the federal workplace.

"The USDA's efforts will ensure a more equitable workplace as well as help the government recruit and retain the most highly qualified and talented Americans," said Elizabeth Birch, HRC executive director. "This bold, intelligent move mirrors the highly effective human resources practices of corporate America and will help create a more efficient and effective federal government."

The agency's move to hire a specialist on gay-related workplace issues is part of a larger effort to attract the most qualified workers by creating a more diverse and equitable workplace. The agency also is advertising for program specialists to represent women, Native Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanic Americans and African Americans.

The jobs are posted on the Internet site of the federal Office of Personnel Management. The career opportunities evolved from a series of employee advisory councils created last year by Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman and inherited by Ann Veneman, his successor in the Bush administration.

The "gay and lesbian program specialist" will help carry out policies recommended by the agency's gay and lesbian employee council and adopted by the agency. Primary responsibilities involve representation, policy development, implementation, training and evaluation of employment and workplace issues related to equal opportunity for gay and lesbian employees, according to the job description posted on the Internet site.

The U.S. Senate passed an amendment June 14 sponsored by Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., to offset a previous anti-gay amendment offered by Jesse Helms, R-N.C. The Boxer amendment, which passed 52-47, ensures all federally chartered organizations are guaranteed access to school facilities regardless of their stance on sexual orientation.

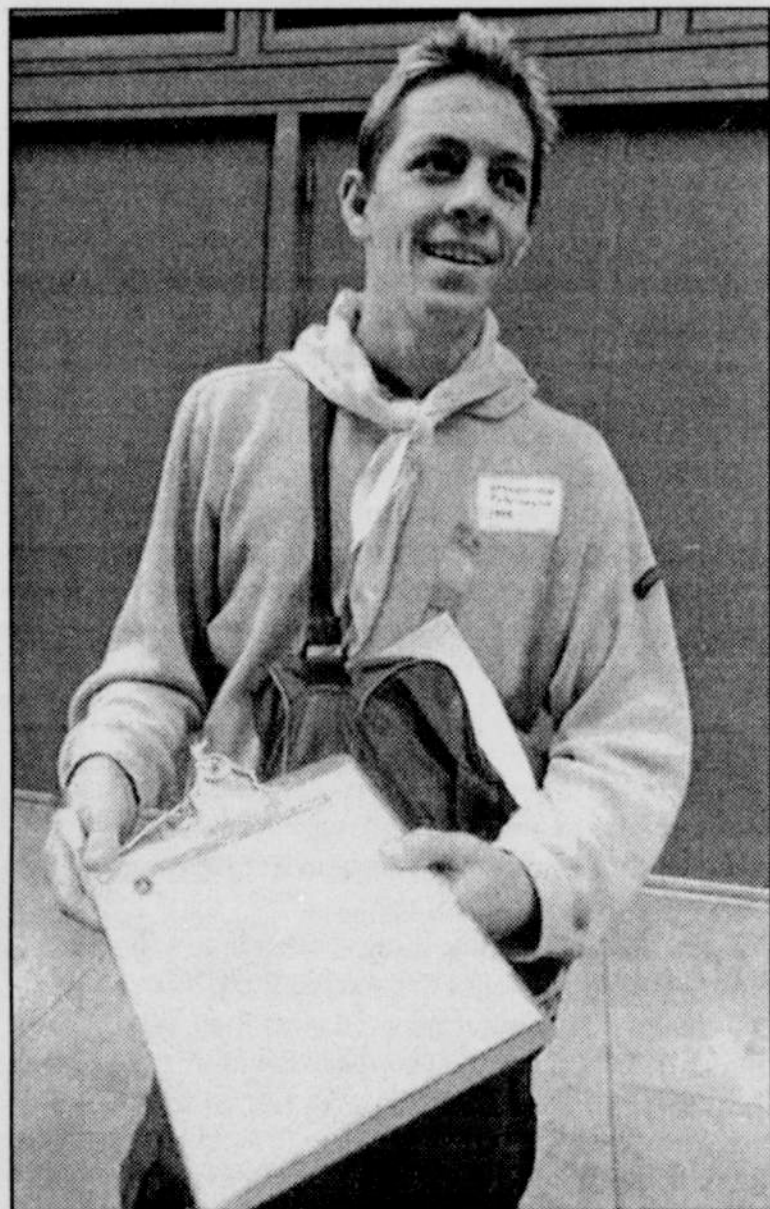
Earlier in the day, the Senate voted 51-49 for passage of the Helms amendment, which prohibits federal funding to schools if they "deny equal access" to Boy Scout troops because of the national group's discriminatory policy banning gay Scouts. Both amendments now are expected to go to a conference committee, where lobbyists will work to remove the anti-gay Helms language from the bill.

The courts already have ruled that school districts must allow the Boy Scouts, like any other group, to have equal access to public facilities. But school districts still are entitled to deny the Boy Scouts special benefits not offered to other groups.



Barbara Boxer

For instance, as the U.S. District Court explained, local school districts are not required to "endorse, participate or solicit others to participate in Boy Scouts activities." Gay rights advocates say the Helms amendment seeks to intimidate school officials into continuing to offer the Boy Scouts these special privileges, even if their discriminatory policy conflicts with a community's values and standards.



Scout's Honor tells the story of Steven Cozza, who is working to overturn the organization's anti-gay policy

Two anti-gay organizations launched a campaign last month to stop the airing of Scout's Honor on PBS' P.O.V. program June 19. The acclaimed documentary, which chronicles efforts to change the Boy Scouts of America policy banning gay Scouts and Scout leaders, won the Audience Award for best documentary and the Freedom of Expression Award at this year's Sundance Film Festival. Concerned Women for America and the American Family Association sent out action alerts calling on members to contact their local PBS stations and pressure them not to air it.

The Washington Times, a conservative newspaper, quoted CWFA's Peter LaBarbera as saying: "It's one thing if [the documentary's producer, Tom Shepard] were to produce a film on his private dime. But when you bring the taxpayer money in...to undermine the Boy Scouts of America, it changes things. Then it becomes a concern of taxpaying Americans."

Joan M. Garry, Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation executive director, said: "This is absolutely about both public broadcasting and taxpayer funding. PBS has a mandate to represent the full diversity of this country, and that includes acknowledging and respecting the diverse community of LGBT taxpayers. Scout's Honor is a fair, accurate and inclusive look at the divisiveness caused by one organization's decision to discriminate. It's a story that informs and educates not only the LGBT community but also the American public, advancing the cultural debate that has played out in the courts and in the media for a number of years." [E]

Compiled by Copy Editor JIM RADOSTA, who can be reached at jim@justout.com.

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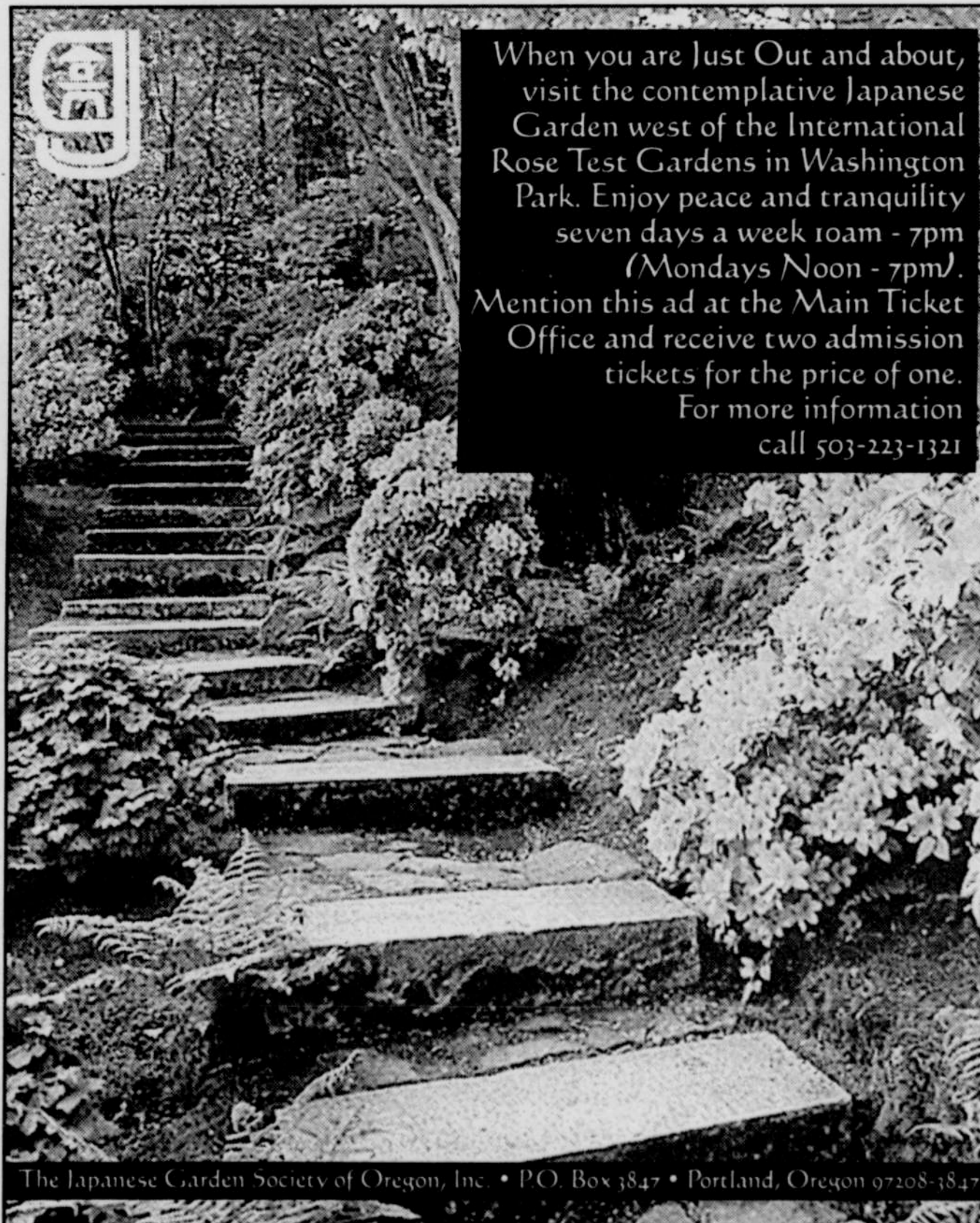
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