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OPINION

Peddling Anti-LGBT Hate in Other Countries

No one should be proud of these exports

BY PETER MONTGOMERY

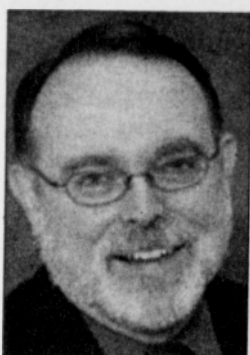
In Arizona, Gov. Jan Brewer has vetoed a bill that would have written anti-gay discrimination into state law in the name of religious freedom.

In Uganda, President Yoweri Museveni signed an even more extremist law that sentences LGBT people to life in prison and punishes pro-equality advocacy with long prison terms.

What do these laws and others like them have in common?

They're both the work of anti-gay religious conservatives, who are now marketing the homophobia that is growing less popular in the U.S. in foreign countries. And they're increasing persecution and violence against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and

transgender people all over the world.



And in Nigeria and Uganda, those new laws unleashed vigilante violence.

One leading U.S. homophobia exporter is Scott Lively, author of a book that claims homosexuals were responsible for the rise of the Nazis in Germany. Most Americans haven't heard of him.

But Lively (a former Oregon resident who was a political player in anti-gay initiatives here a decade ago) has spent years traveling in Africa, Russia, and Eastern Europe, where he has met with legislators, law enforcement officials, and others in a position to spread his deadly message.

In country after country, Lively claims that gay people want to "recruit" children and destroy faith and freedom.

Sadly, Lively is far from alone.

In the documentary "God Loves Uganda," American evangelist Lou Engle is seen at a rally promoting the anti-gay bill and saying he was called to stand with the church in Uganda as it stands for "righteousness." While some conservatives said the bill went too far, the Family Research Council's Tony Perkins called the legislation "an effort to uphold moral conduct."

Among those who backed Nigeria's law while it was being considered was the Liberty Counsel's Matt Barber, who derided EU "homofascists" who criticized legislative approval of a similar law a few years ago.

While Russia uses its anti-gay law to punish dissenters and journalists, American religious right activists have praised it and gushed about strongman president Vladimir Putin.

A large number of U.S. social conservatives will be heading to Moscow in September for the

2014 summit of the World Congress of Families.

They're ecstatic about working with the Russian government. Last year, the WCF's managing director said, "The Russians might be the Christian saviors of the world."

Similarly, the American Family Association's Bryan Fischer called Putin "the lion of Christianity, the defender of Christian values, the president that's calling his nation back to embracing its identity as a nation founded on Christian values."

Frankly, that's embarrassing.

What should also be embarrassing is the habit these activists have of portraying themselves as victims of religious persecution. They could learn

what persecution looks like from LGBT activists in Russian jails and teens who are tortured and humiliated online. Or from Nigerians facing flogging, mob violence, and death sentences in Sharia courts. Or from Ugan-

dans who fear being hunted and are forced to flee their country. And from LGBT teens around the world who face diminished futures thanks to the hostility and discrimination encouraged and funded by American religious groups.

Meanwhile lots of religious right leaders claim they aren't anti-gay. They say they love gay people and are simply asking for "live and let live" policies.

Yet many of these people travel the world, falsely equating homosexuality with pedophilia, denouncing LGBT people as enemies of faith, family, and freedom, and defending laws that make gay people criminals.

No one should be proud of peddling these toxic and frequently deadly exports.

Peter Montgomery is a senior fellow at People for the American Way Foundation. Distributed via OtherWords (OtherWords.org).

Common Core and Closing the Achievement Gap

Critics unfairly characterize new standards

BY MARC H. MORIAL

Sixty years after the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling ending segregation in America's public schools, separate and unequal is still a pervasive reality. While de jure, or legal segregation has been abolished, de facto, or the actual practice of segregation, is greater now than it was 40 years ago.

Black and brown students are less likely to share classrooms with white students. We also see separate and unequal levels of expectations and resources in our schools that continue to break down along the color line. The unfortunate result of all of this is a widening achievement gap between the races.

The achievement levels of students of color, especially those

burdened with the economic and social disadvantages of poverty, are falling further and further behind their white peers, even as our entire nation loses ground globally. This is a recipe for economic and social disaster, but it can be avoided if we make closing the achievement gap a na-

mation that has been used to create confusion and distort the facts around Common Core for math and English language arts that are now being implemented in most states.

The National Urban League supports this historic reform, largely because it is geared to

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tional priority, guided by a commitment to a common set of principles.

That is a commitment that 45 states (including Oregon and Washington) and the District of Columbia have made with the adoption of Common Core State Standards—that all students will have the same expectations for learning regardless of their zip codes.

In a recent column, I aimed to clear up much of the misinfor-

better prepare all students for college and the jobs of today and tomorrow. Higher standards for every student, implementation that is resourced equitably, instruction based on real-world problem-solving rather than rote learning, and clear and consistent expectations will also help close the widening achievement gap between races and economic classes. These standards are also benchmarked against international standards.

The latest National Assessment of Educational Progress study finds that only 16 percent of black students are reading at or above grade level compared with 44 percent of white students, a gap of 28 percent. At the same time, the achievement gap between students in the United States and their European and Asian peers is also widening.

According to 2012 Programme for International Student Assessment results, students in 25 other countries are doing better than American students in math, while 16 other countries exceed U.S. achievement levels in reading.

Clearly, we must do better, and implementing the Common Core is an initial step we can take. Education is not only the civil rights issue of our times, it is also increasingly the fault line that will determine winners and losers in the global economy.

We will not be able to close the achievement gap if we continue to have different expectations for different students. All students should have access to

college and career ready standards, but the Common Core State Standards alone cannot close the achievement gaps in our nation.

Achieving equity and excellence in education requires an approach which also includes reducing income inequality and poverty, equalizing public school funding, and supporting greater parental involvement.

We recognize that there have been implementation challenges with Common Core that need to be addressed. We know that the resources, tools and training need to be in place to meet the promise of these standards. Once these implementation wrinkles are ironed out, we believe that over time, a commitment to higher standards for every student will go a long way towards closing the achievement gap.

As long as critics unfairly characterize and misrepresent Common Core State Standards, we will continue to work to replace confusion with clarity.

Marc H. Morial is president and chief executive officer of the National Urban League.