

After Refusing to Bow to Gay Agenda, Exxon Mobile Caves on Same-Sex Marriage Benefits

Exxon Mobil Corp said on Friday it will extend benefits to spouses of its U.S. workers in **same-sex marriages**, a sweeping reversal by one of the world's top companies following a landmark Supreme Court ruling in June.

Though many U.S. corporations, especially progressive ones like Apple Inc, have long offered **domestic partner benefits** to gay couples, the step at Exxon—the biggest publicly traded oil company—was heralded as especially significant for a company that has resisted repeated calls for change.

“Today's announcement by ExxonMobil shows the tide is continuing to turn in corporate America,” New York State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli said in a statement.

“This is a very positive step for the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) community and a vindication of years of efforts by shareholders and activists across the country.”

New York's retirement fund owns 13.5 million Exxon shares valued at about \$1.2 billion.

Exxon had long avoided extending the **gay marriage** benefits in the United States, saying its policies were governed by federal laws.

Before Friday's announcement, the company had recognized gay marriages in some 30 countries around the world where it operates and where same-sex unions are legal, but it had not recognized **same-sex marriages** from U.S. states that allow them.

Critics said the company, headquartered in conservative Texas, had been dragging its feet, especially because peers like Chevron Corp and Royal Dutch Shell are known for their liberal policies for gay and transgender workers.

“After years of stubbornly refusing, we commend Exxon for joining the majority of the Fortune 500 business leaders that already treat gay and lesbian married couples equally under employee benefit plans,” Tico Almeida, founder and president of the LGBT organization Freedom to Work, said in a statement.

Exxon was prompted to revise its stance for its U.S. workers after the Supreme Court struck down a key portion of the **Defense of Marriage Act**, which had defined marriage as between a man and a woman. That led to same-sex couple eligibility for federal benefits.

The company itself described the move as reflecting a change in U.S. policy, not its own.

“We have made no change in the definition of eligibility for our U.S. benefit plans. Spousal eligibility in our U.S. benefit plans has been and continues to be governed by the federal definition of marriage and spouse,” it said in a statement announcing it would recognize “all legal marriages”.

The Human Rights Campaign (HRC) has in the past blasted Exxon for scrapping Mobil’s anti-discrimination policy that protected gay workers after Mobil was acquired in 1999.

HRC praised Exxon’s extension of benefits to spouses in same-sex unions as a step in the right direction but the civil rights organization said Exxon still does not provide specific anti-discrimination protections to gay, bisexual and transgender workers.

In May, DiNapoli’s New York State Common Retirement fund submitted a proposal asking Exxon to amend its employment policy to explicitly prohibit discrimination based on sexual

orientation and gender identity. The proposal, which received the support of about 20 percent of shareholders, has been on Exxon's proxies for 16 years.

Exxon has previously said its current policies already prohibit any kind of discrimination.

In August, retailer Wal-Mart Stores Inc also moved to extend benefits to people within same-sex marriages.

Marriage equality activists scored another victory on Friday. A New Jersey judge ordered state officials to allow same-sex couples to marry starting October 21, saying the current civil union system unfairly deprives them of federal benefits available to married couples. It became the fourteenth U.S. state to do so.

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