Exxon Rejects Gay-Discrimination Ban

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DALLAS (AP) — The CEO of Exxon Mobil Corp. says there's no quick replacement for oil, and sharply cutting oil's use to reduce greenhouse gas emissions would make it harder to lift 2 billion people out of poverty.

"What good is it to save the planet if humanity suffers?" CEO Rex Tillerson said at the oil giant's annual meeting Wednesday.

Tillerson jousted with environmental activists who proposed that the company set goals to reduce emissions from its products and operations.

Shareholders sided with the company and voted nearly 3-to-1 to reject the proposal.

By a 4-to-1 ratio, shareholders defeated a resolution to explicitly ban discrimination against gays. The Exxon board had argued that the company already banned discrimination of any type and didn't need to add language regarding gays.

It was the 16th defeat for Exxon resolutions on discrimination against gays and the seventh on greenhouse emissions.

Since Tillerson replaced Lee Raymond as CEO in 2006, Exxon has softened the tone of its public comments but not its skepticism about climate change. Tillerson said that in the past decade the average temperature "hasn't really changed," and he repeated his optimism that technology will solve the problem.

The average global temperature rose one quarter of a degree Fahrenheit from the 10 years that ended in 2002 to the decade that ended in 2012, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. However, the decade of 2000-2009 was the hottest on record, and nine of the 10 hottest years have occurred since 2001.

Activists argued that climate change will result in more severe weather. Patricia Daley, a member of the New Jersey-based group of Dominican nuns that proposed the climate-change resolution, cited last year's East Coast hurricane.

"I had to evacuate a lot of old nuns because of Superstorm Sandy," Daley said. She said that with rising carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere, "we're in desperate territory right now."

Shareholders voted down a resolution calling for Exxon to report details about its use of hydraulic fracturing, a method of boosting natural gas production that critics argue can contaminate water supplies with toxic chemicals.

Environmentalists also criticized the company's production of oil from tar sands in

Canada, which they said adds to greenhouse gas emissions. They urged Exxon to invest more in wind, solar and geothermal energy. The company has made forays into alternative energy sources but argues that the world will be dependent on oil for decades.

The ban on bias based on sexual orientation was proposed by a retirement fund for New York state employees. George Wong, an official for the New York comptroller's office, said the lack of specific protection for gays hurt the company's ability to recruit employees from the widest pool of talent.

Wong said Exxon discriminates by refusing to extend spousal benefits to employees who marry a gay partner in New York, where same-sex marriage is legal.

Exxon's annual meeting once drew dozens of protesters from environmental and human-rights groups, but only a few demonstrators appeared outside Wednesday's meeting in an ornate symphony hall. Inside, there were few sparks or angry exchanges. The characters have become familiar to each other. After Daley finished speaking, Tillerson said from the stage, "Thank you, Sister Pat."

Exxon Mobil is coming off its second-biggest profit ever, having earned $44.9 billion in 2012.

The shares rose 2 percent last year, the same as rival Chevron Corp. This year, through Tuesday, Exxon shares had gained 7 percent while Chevron shares had risen 17 percent.

Exxon shares fell 30 cents to $92.08 in trading Wednesday. They were still near the high end of their 52-week range of $77.13 to $93.67.

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AP Science Writer Seth Borenstein contributed to this report from Washington.

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