

# The Palm Beach Post

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## Hundreds hold 'Hands Across the Sand' to protest oil drilling off Florida's coast

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The man on the stage says it's time, and Ian, who is 8, is ready.

"Yes!" he yells, and makes a break for the sand.

Ian is at Lake Worth Beach with the rest of them — a few hundred in all — for the protest. They are wearing black — the color of oil — and will line up on the sand and hold hands to let everyone know what they think of drilling off of Florida's coast. (Answer: Not much.)

Still, the legislature mulled the idea last year, and is expected to do so again. In response, activists held a protest at 80 beaches throughout the state — right then, 1 p.m. Saturday, called "Hands Across the Sand."

But first, in Lake Worth, they must get in line.

As they move to do so, Jeff Clemens, once mayor of Lake Worth, now running for a state House seat, spots a reporter. Some of the protesters are barefoot; Clemens is wearing a black suit, which he justifies with, "I am a politician."

"The idea that we would put oil rigs off our beaches is not only environmentally ridiculous, it's economically irresponsible, because our beaches are the reason tourists come to Florida," Clemens says. "Nobody wants to come to the beach to see an oil rig — or worse, an oil spill."

So they line up, and they wait. The man on the stage had said a plane would come to take their picture. But the plane hasn't come yet, and it won't be here for a bit.

Ian is restless. He's with his mom, Elissa Pearl, who is running for county commission. When it comes to drilling, "I just don't see an upside," she says.

As she speaks, Ian and his sister Alexandra, 4, are conducting an urgent relocation effort, grabbing sand up from the beach and tossing it in the water.

On a break from that, Ian says drilling is "very bad." His mom and dad gave him pros and cons that morning, so he could decide for himself. Dad did pros. Mom did cons. Mom won.

"It kills penguins," he says.

Down the line, Pam Bergsma is chilly.

It's been an hour now, and the plane won't be there for another 30 minutes, and the wind is gusting.

But it's worth it, she says quickly, for the aerial shot.

She's been living in Lake Worth for 37 years, and she is there with her husband, Walle, who is from Holland. (After all these years, the Pixar movie finally taught people to spell his name.) They walk on the beach regularly and see a lot of trash, and it bugs her, so they bring a garbage bag.

"This planet is very fragile," she says. "We are the keepers of this planet, and we haven't been doing too good a job of it, I'm afraid."

Half an hour passes.

Then, finally, to cheers and applause, the plane comes. People pop up from the sand. Ian waves — rotating both hands, palms out, like 8-year-olds do.

It flies by a few times, then the line unzips and people head for solid ground.

Todd Rimmel, who organized it all, is pleased.

He's the Palm Beach County chapter vice-chair of the Surfrider Foundation, which organized the Lake Worth event at the city commission's request; the foundation is dedicated to preserving the beaches. Other groups, like the Palm Beach Democratic Party and the Sierra Club, joined in.

Rimmel was up till 4 a.m. Saturday getting everything ready. They have made "an unmistakable statement." He adds: "This is like Christmas for me."

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