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*The Beacon is a publication written by the Beacon staff; the editorial views expressed are those of the authors. The Beacon Editor can be reached at [Beacon\\_Editor@gt Dems.org](mailto:Beacon_Editor@gt Dems.org).*

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## **March 28 “No Kings” Draws More than 3,000**

The March 28 “No Kings” protest march drew more than 3,000 people. The *Beacon* recorded video at the corner of State and Franklin and counted people passing the camera in one-minute samples



Figure 1: Marchers at the March 28 No Kings Protest wait in F&M Park before starting the 1.4 mile route. Photo by Jim Breit

for each five-minute period during the 37 minutes it took for the marchers to leave the staging area at F&M park. This sampling approach led to an estimate of between 3,000 and 3,100 people, but this estimate does not account for people who joined the march west of Franklin Street. Due to unavailability of parking near F&M park, it is likely that hundreds joined the march west of Franklin Street.

A tiny selection of sign pictures is [included at the end of this Beacon](#). Spoiler... the Epstein files aren't going away any time soon.

## **Preview: BOC to Study East Bay TIF Proposal, Treasurer Update on Reconciliation Delays and Facility Financing Options**

By Bruce Moore

The Wednesday, April 8 Study Session will cover three unusually significant topics: an East Bay Township proposal to use Tax Increment Financing (TIF) funding for a improvements in the US-31 corridor, the status of 2025 bank account reconciliations as the 2025 audit begins, and financing alternatives for the various projects that are in planning stages. The Board does not vote during Study Sessions, but frequently gives Administration guidance on revisions for future votes. The [full 73-page packet](#) is available on the County website.

### **Use of TIF Expected to Be Core Topic**

TIF funding captures revenue from future property value growth—both inflation and greater than inflation. During the airport bond credit risk discussion, the County's bond consultant indicated that without considering this revenue growth, taking credit risk for the airport bonds would lower the County's credit rating with currently defined projects; with the revenue growth it would not lower the credit rating.

The merits and appropriateness of TIF financing for the East Bay project may ultimately be irrelevant to the discussion; because the County accepted credit risk for the airport bonds, the County may not be in a position to give up future revenue growth to this or other TIF proposals.

Based upon comments during previous TIF discussions, readers should expect robust discussion on the use of TIF financing generally, and specifically for projects that primarily benefit tourism-related businesses. The proposed TIF may come up a second time during the financing discussion later in the agenda.

The Board previously discussed both the Tax Sharing Policy and the East Bay proposal at the March 11 Study Session. The discussion on TIF policy centered mostly on the proposed addition of one paragraph in the draft policy:

As a condition of participation, the County will only participate in a tax increment financing district if the local municipality contributes an equal or greater share of tax increment revenue. The County will not contribute more tax increment revenue than the municipality.

There was also significant discussion about how to handle inflation, as neither the current nor planned policy address this; currently, TIFs capture all inflation and tend to starve the taxing entity of funds in the long term.

The proposed East Bay TIF would capture county taxes and fund projects like clearing sidewalks and road crossings, which in Traverse City are financed through general tax dollars, not TIF.

Interestingly, Commissioner Hentschel was present but silent during the March 11 TIF discussion; he represents the portion of East Bay Township where the proposed TIF is located.

### **East Bay Corridor Improvement Authority to Include Pedestrian Safety Improvements**

The proposed Corridor Improvement Authority in the East Bay Beach District would roughly cover both sides of US-31 from the Airport Access Road (just west of Tom’s East Bay) to Five-mile Road (just west of Bayview Restaurant) as shown in the figure that follows.

The project summary [lists the following projects](#):

1. Installing safe pedestrian crossings approximately every ¼ mile along U.S. 31 North.
2. Maintaining sidewalks year-round, including winter snow removal.
3. Completing the sidewalk network on both sides of U.S. 31 North and along Three Mile and Four Mile Roads.
4. Developing a pedestrian pier to enhance public access to East Grand Traverse Bay.
5. Adding planters, seating, landscaping, and lighting to create a more welcoming and walkable corridor.
6. Funding improvements to the Bayline bus route, including pullouts and permanent shelters.

### **Treasurer to Report on 2025 Bank Account Reconciliation Status as Audit Begins**

In October, 2025, James Callahan, the County Treasurer indicated that his office was not up to date on reconciling the County’s bank transactions with the County’s general ledger—essentially the equivalent of balancing your checkbook—but that he would be caught up by November 1. At the February 11, 2026 Study Session, Callahan indicated that 45 items were still unreconciled, and that two employees had left the Treasurer’s Department the previous week. At the March 4, 2026 meeting, Dean Bott indicated that some accounts still had not been reconciled, but that he expected they would be completed by March 16th, when the County’s 2025 audit was scheduled to begin.

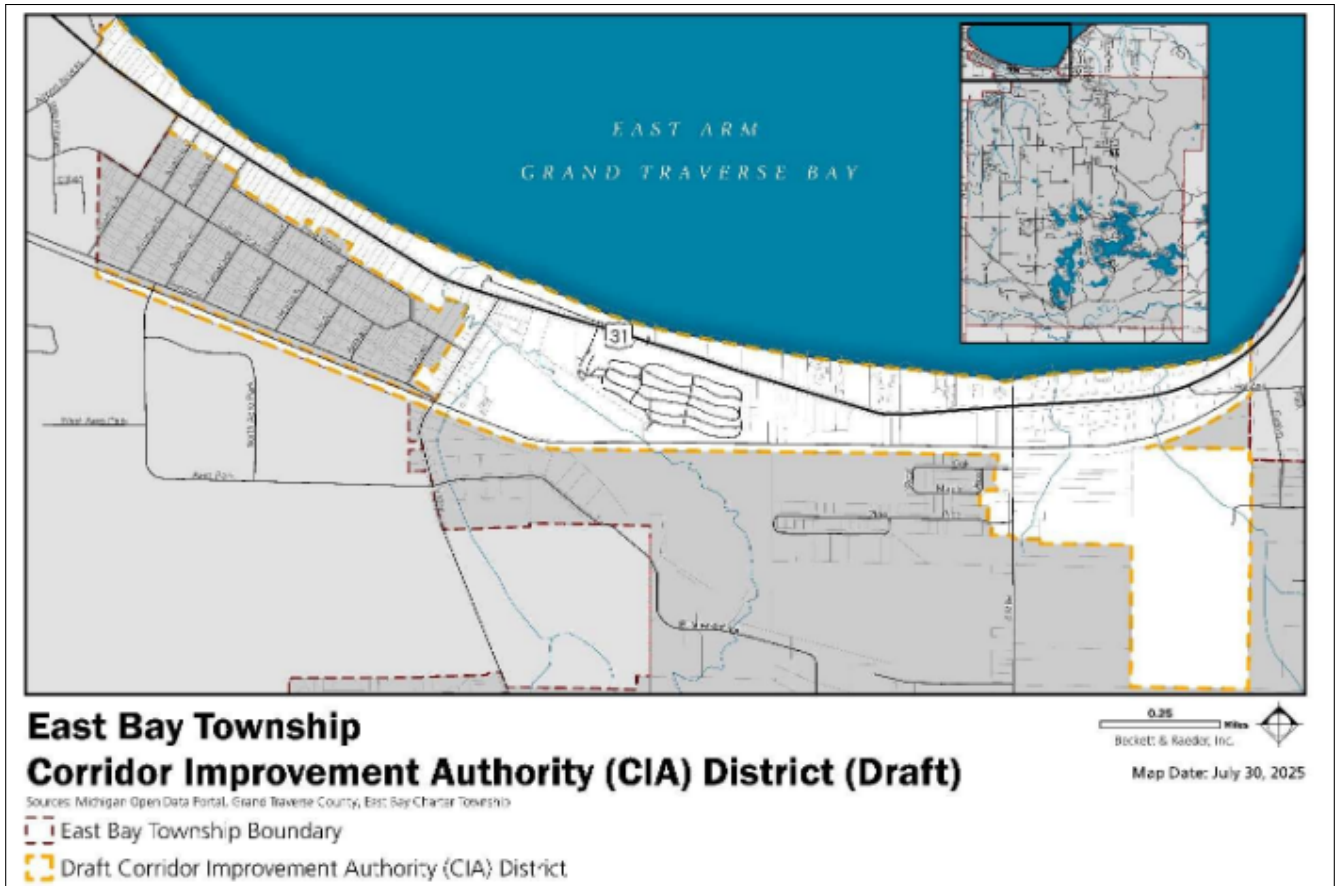


Figure 2: Map of Proposed Boundaries for East Bay Corridor Improvement Authority from BOC packet page 17.

The issues with bank account reconciliation are expected to appear on the 2025 audit report; this in turn could result in a credit downgrade, and higher borrowing costs for future projects.

Callahan is scheduled to give a verbal update to the Board at the April 8 meeting.

[Callahan defeated Sara Gum in the August, 2024 Republican Primary](#) and was unopposed in the November, 2024 General Election. [Gum, a 12-year employee in the Treasurer’s Department was appointed Treasurer in January, 2024](#) when Heidi Scheppe resigned as Treasurer to take the higher-paying Finance Director role with the City.

### **Board to Study Financing Options for Future Projects**

The last item on the agenda is a discussion of different approaches to funding project Alpha (911 Dispatch replacement) currently under way, the planned Jail replacement, and the planned Government Center renovation. Some of the scenarios use cannabis funds that are currently distributed in a process similar to the Tribe’s 2% grants; the grant-distribution use of the cannabis funds will probably end, at least temporarily, once the various construction projects begin.

The Board previously studied funding options at the [March 11 Study Session](#). In all models [there was a shortfall in some years](#), but none of the models presented used cannabis funds; this is the reason the current models use the cannabis funds. The models also did not use expected future revenue growth; incorporating future revenue growth to avoid shortfalls would make reducing revenue growth via TIFs would be a problem.

### **March 4: BOC Approves Facilities Location Contract**

By Bruce Moore

At the March 4 Regular Meeting, the Board of Commissioners approved a Plante Moran Realpoint facility location study, and reviewed the continuing structural problems at the Jail. The full [packet is available on the County website](#).

All Commissioners were present.

### **Road Commission Indicates Beitner Road Canoe Launch Will Be Closed**

Dan Watkins, Road Commission Manager, indicated that when the Beitner Road bridge over the Boardman River is replaced, the access to the DNR canoe launch will be closed. County Administrator Alger indicated that there are talks with the City to gain access via an easement through City-owned park land; this may require a city referendum.

### **BOC Structures Plante Moran Realpoint Contract to Avoid Problems Similar to TowerPinkster Report**

The Board approved a contract with Plante Moran Realpoint to prepare a facility location study, and discussed contract management procedures with the Administrator to ensure that this study is more useful than the TowerPinkster study prepared during Commissioner Hentschel’s term as Chair. The TowerPinkster study presumed that all County offices would be moved to the LaFranier campus, which would cost well over \$150 million and require a county-wide vote to move the County Seat from Traverse City to Garfield Township.

## **Jail Structural Problems Get Worse, But Do Not Now Require Evacuation**

After the floor in the Jail lobby buckled last fall, the County commissioned an engineering study of the structural problems; the study was completed in October, but the various gauges for measuring structural movement were left in place. After additional movement occurred over the ensuing months, the Facilities Department brought the engineering firm back for additional work to further investigate the problem. The conclusion presented to the Board is that there is no current need to evacuate the Jail, but that plans for the new Jail should not be delayed.

The Sheriff indicated that there are plans for a full evacuation of the Jail if that were to become necessary for structural or other reasons. Of note, both the Sheriff and Circuit Court Judge Hamlyn were in attendance at the meeting; this is the first time in memory that Judge Hamlyn (or any judge) has attended a meeting when neither he nor the Court Administrator were speaking.

The consulting engineer indicated that some of the subsidence issues were due to problems with previous structures at the site. A review of historical Sanborn Fire Insurance maps showed a previous structure with a catch basin (believed to be under the gymnasium) and other removed features that are subsiding/compacting at different rates.

## **Cybersecurity Policy Updates Needed for Sheriff's Office and Courts**

The Board briefly discussed the problems with compliance with the Cybersecurity Policy and problems in the policy that make it legally difficult for some court and law enforcement employees to sign and comply with parts of the policy. The policy will be reviewed to resolve these issues.

## **Board Engages Drain Commissioner for Some Dam Inspection and Operation Responsibilities**

The County has legal responsibility for maintenance and operation of several dams that are not a part of the Drain Commissioner's statutory responsibilities. The Board passed a series of resolutions delegating some responsibilities to the Drain Commissioner through the end of 2026. The Board also formed a committee to work on the issues related to Grand Traverse County's responsibilities for the Antrim County Chain of Lakes. The committee will report back to the full Board in May.

The Board also voted to make public the questions and answers posed to Civil Counsel regarding the Antrim County Chain of Lakes issues. [These documents are available on the County website.](#)

## **March 11: BOC Studies Zero-based and Multi-year Budgeting**

By Bruce Moore

At the March 11 Study Session, the Board of Commissioners discussed zero-based budgeting and multi-year budgeting with a specialist from MSU, and discussed the County's tax sharing (including Tax Increment Financing) policy for revisions. The [21-page packet](#) and [minutes](#) are available on the County website.

This *Beacon* reviewed the tax sharing policy in the preview for the April 8 meeting.

Commissioners Walter and Morris were absent.

## **MSU Extension Reviews Zero-based and Multi-year Budgeting with BOC**

Eric Walcott of the MSU Extension program in government presented an overview of “zero-based budgeting,” an approach that originated with Jimmy Carter during his time as Governor of Georgia and later as President. It is essentially an approach that looks at what is required to achieve the minimum statutorily required service level, and repeats this analysis each year. It is a process that works to align spending with priorities, and can be very labor intensive, as it requires capturing work measurement information that most governments (or businesses) do not capture.

Much of the discussion revolved around the County’s lack of strategic, infrastructure investment and other plans that are fundamental to the zero-based budget process for aligning spending with priorities.

The multi-year budgeting process requires forecasting and planning that the County does not routinely do, but there was a consensus that this would be a step in the right direction.

## **March 18: Board Approves Bonding for Project Alpha**

By Bruce Moore

The Board approved a Community Development Block Grant Loan to Umbo Traverse City LLC, heard a brief review of the Jail and Justice Facility engagement timeline, approved a guaranteed maximum price (\$28 million) contract to proceed on Project Alpha (911 Dispatch replacement), and voted to proceed with the issuance of up to \$30 million worth of bonds for Project Alpha. The project is comprised of an Emergency Communications Center, Emergency Operations Center and Combined Operations Building. The latter will be used primarily by the Commission on Aging.

The [347-page meeting packet is available](#) on the County website, as are [the minutes](#).

Commissioners Flynn and McAllister were absent.

## **Board Approves Contracts and Bonds to Finance Project Alpha**

The guaranteed maximum price for Project Alpha buildings is slightly less than \$28 million. An additional \$1 million will be needed for furniture and fixtures. Currently, Cunningham-Limp expects 84% of the subcontractors will be local. The total project is expected to be completed in May, 2027.

The issues with the DTE pipeline easement have been worked out; during construction, workers will need to place reinforcing timbers over the pipeline as they move construction equipment over the pipeline.

## **AI Software for Non-emergency Calls Finally Working Nine Months After Purchase**

After the contract for AI-enhanced non-emergency call answering software was signed in July, the software did not go live until October, 2025, and required much additional configuration after installation. The dispatch center expected 30% of calls to the non-emergency line to be automatically routed; initially it only routed 3-5%. In the last two months, however, it has routed about 30% of calls made to the non-emergency number.

Corey LeCureaux, 911 Director, indicated that callers who speak conversationally to the AI software tend to get faster and better call routing than those who treat it like a traditional voice response unit.

### **Community Development Block Grant Loans**

The BOC approved a Community Development Block Grant loan to Umbo Traverse City LLC for a new restaurant that plans to generate two jobs for residents earning less than 80% of the area median income. The loan is \$50,000 for three years at 3% interest, about 3% below rate for a typical commercial loan. Approximately \$600,000 remain available for lending through this program.



East Bay Township has openings for a planning commissioner, two zoning board appeals members, two board of review (property tax) members and a food security advisory member. For information go to <https://eastbaytwp.org/government/employment.php>.

BATA needs a rural member. The application form is available at [on the County website](https://www.gtcountymi.gov/344/Bay-Area-Transportation-Authority). For more information, see <https://www.gtcountymi.gov/344/Bay-Area-Transportation-Authority>.

## No Kings Signs Show Common Anti-war, Epstein, and Immigration Themes

Arguably the best and most original sign was made by a high-school girl: “If Kamala had won, we’d all be having brunch right now.”

### Contacting the Beacon

The Beacon Editor can be reached at [Beacon\\_Editor@gt Dems.org](mailto:Beacon_Editor@gt Dems.org).

### Helpful Links and Info

BOC meetings are usually held at 9:00 am on the first and third Wednesday of the month. Find a link to the agenda at: <https://grandtraversecounty.civicweb.net/Portal/MeetingInformation.aspx?Org=Cal>.

Watch the livestream of the meetings at: <https://www.tacm.tv/govtvnow.asp>.

The BOC permits public comment for up to three minutes each at the beginning and end of each meeting. Public comment remotely is not allowed. If you wish to make a public comment, you need to attend the meeting.

The BOC has nine commissioners—five Republicans and four Democrats—each of whom represents a district. Find your commissioner at: <https://www.gtcountymi.gov/184/Board-of-Commissioners>.

Recent [airport meetings](#) are available on Youtube.

Email all commissioners at: [commissioners@gtcountymi.gov](mailto:commissioners@gtcountymi.gov).

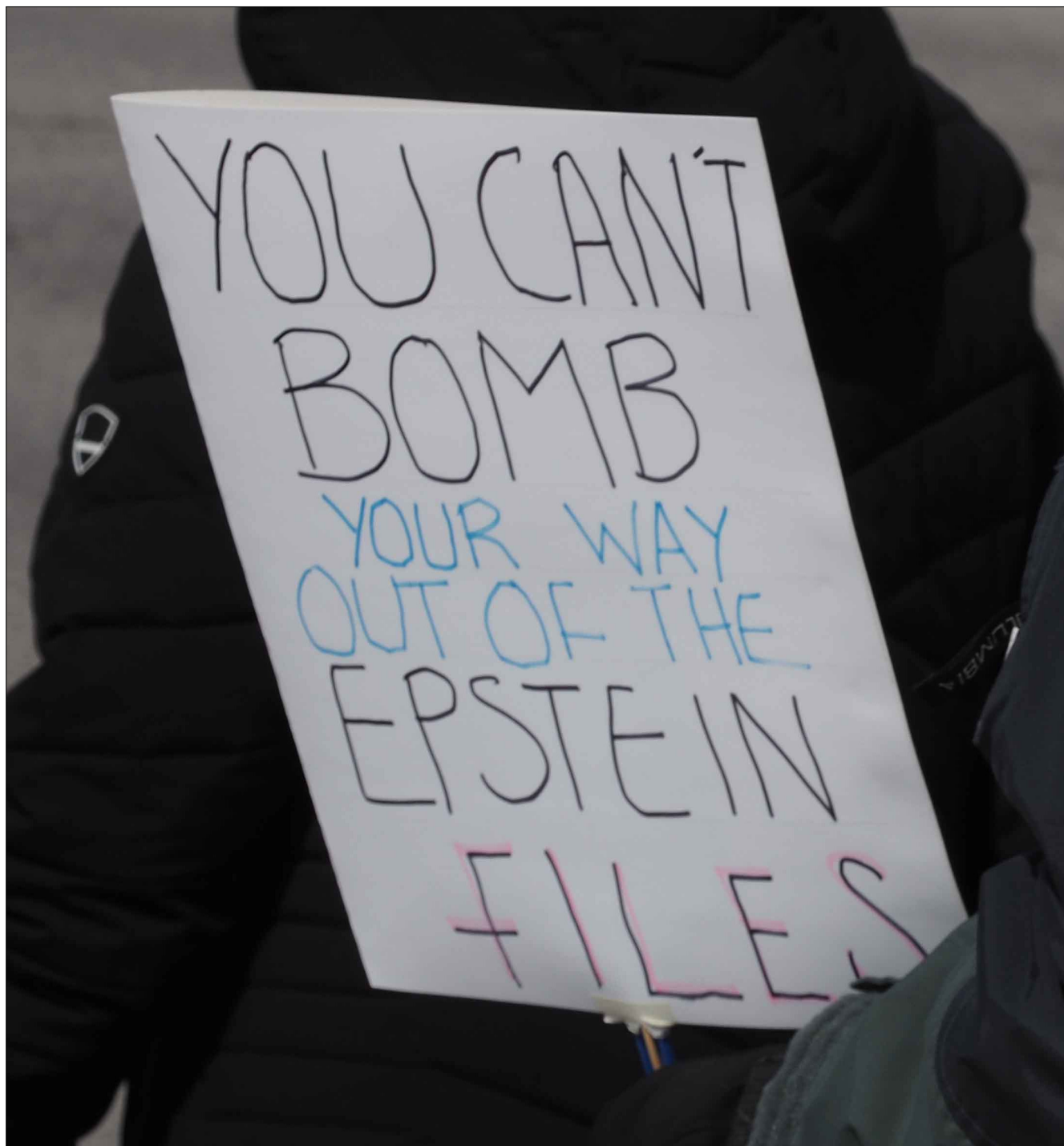


Figure 3: Many marchers clearly think the war in Iran is intended to distract the world from Trump's many appearances in the Epstein files. Photo by Bruce Moore



Figure 4: References to Trump's birthday card to Epstein appeared in several signs. Photo by Bruce Moore



Figure 5: There were many anti-war signs. Photo by Harold Lassers

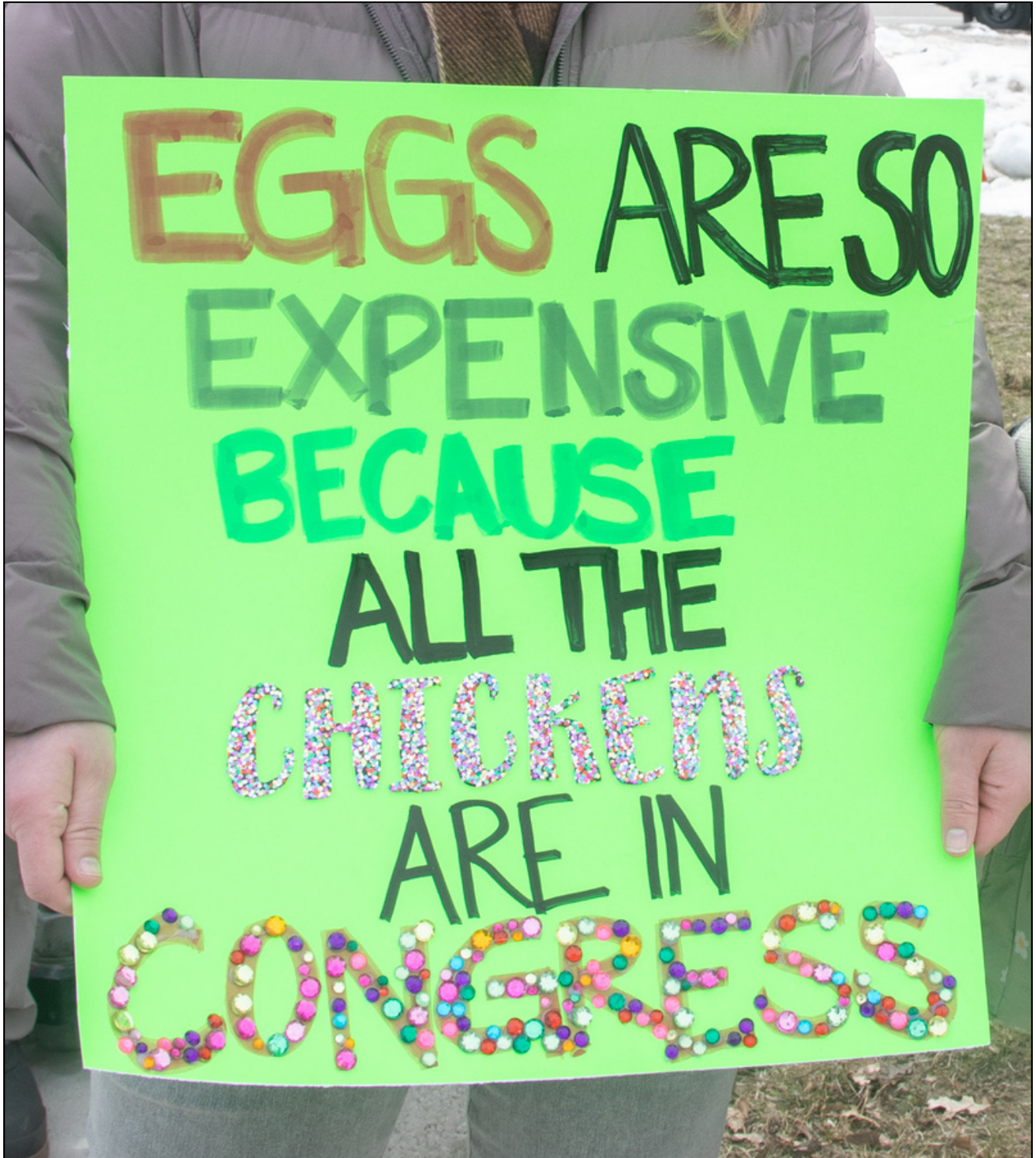


Figure 6: Affordability and covering Republican Representatives were a common theme. Photo by Harold Lassers



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