## Wage

From A1

The 1.75% annual raise will increase Nebraska's minimum wage by 26 to 30 cents annually for its first eight years in effect. Under the bill, the state's minimum wage would surpass $16 an hour in 2031 and breach $17 per hour in 2035.

But the compromise did not appease Democrats, who were unmoved by the guaranteed annual increase and filibustered Raybould's bill again Wednesday, casting it as an attempt to chip away at the will of Nebraska voters.

Under the law passed by voters, Nebraska's minimum wage was set to rise annually according to the Midwest consumer price index, which has risen by as much as as 9.5% in recent years and hasn't dipped below 2.5% since at least 2022 — meaning the fixed annual increase established by Raybould's bill will raise the minimum wage by less than what the voter-approved law originally would have based off recent data.

"If inflation is increasing and the price of eggs or the price of gas or the price of housing is going up, and we artificially restrain minimum wage earnings from keeping pace with that, it drives working families deeper into poverty," said Sen. Danielle Conrad of Lincoln, who led Wednesday's filibuster against Raybould's bill.

Opponents, too, pointed to the 2022 election results in which more than 57% of voters — including voters in 37 of Nebraska's 49 legislative districts — backed the hike to the state's minimum wage, which lawmakers have never voted to raise.

Raybould's bill is one of several introduced this year that seek to narrow laws enacted by Nebraska voters in recent years. Lawmakers have granted first-round approval to a bill that would exclude certain employees from the paid sick leave law passed by nearly 75% of voters in November, while a bill to implement voter-approved medical cannabis laws remains stuck in the Legislature's General Affairs Committee.

Kauth

Moser

"It's just ridiculous," Omaha Sen. Terrell McKinney said, calling for the Legislature to rebrand itself "the … Legislature to go against the will of the people of Nebraska."

But Raybould and her Republican allies in the body disputed the notion that they were undermining state voters, noting that Nebraska's constitution gives lawmakers the right to amend laws passed by voters and casting doubt on the purity of the $3.57 million ballot campaign that led to the minimum wage increase.

"By my estimation, it's almost $3.5 million they spent to promote this ballot question, and they got about 330,000 votes," Sen. Mike Moser of Columbus said. "So it's not so much the will of the people as it is the will of the people from Washington, D.C., that contributed all this money."

Sen. Kathleen Kauth of Omaha, meanwhile, argued that the "minimum wage was not put in place to support families."

"Minimum wage was put in place as a safeguard against people being used too much," she said. "If you want more money — if you need more money — ask for more responsibility, increase your skills, change yourself rather than asking the government to do it for you and you don't change anything at all."

After four hours of debate, the Legislature voted 33-16 to end the filibuster as Raybould, a Democrat, joined nearly every Republican to push the bill to the final round of debate.

Reach the writer at 402-473-7223 or awegley@journalstar.com. On Twitter @andrewwegley

## Center

From A1

this new space also came from investments that have slowly built up over the years, Van Cleave said.

"Our hospital has probably been debt free since 2012," he said. "We've been able to expand and grow facilities, including expansion to our childcare facility, we've been able to expand the Columbus Wellness Center, the Columbus Field House, other acquisitions, and we've been able to do that through our operations and investing activities."

The final bid for construction is still to be finalized, but the equipment was acquired a while ago, when prices were lower, which helps a lot with cost, Van Cleave said.

The hospital is a not-for-profit operation, though obviously has to pay overhead costs, which means the profits it does bring in are reinvested, whether that's into financial investments, salaries, replacing equipment or expansions like the new cancer center.

"We have strategic planning sessions with our board, with our leadership here, with our directors, and we involve everybody's input," Van Cleave said. "So we are usually planning out three, five, eight years, sometimes longer, in terms of what expansion we're looking at."


COLUMBUS COMMUNITY HOSPITAL

Bob Mead, whose family is the namesake of the Mead Family Cancer Center planned for Columbus Community Hospital, speaks to an attendee of the cancer center's groundbreaking on May 1.

# Record number of cranes counted during annual migration

**MARJIE DUCEY**
Omaha World-Herald

It was a spring of science, magic and milestones during this year's sandhill crane migration.

The biggest moment came March 17 during the week-five aerial count when a record 736,000 birds were observed, obliterating the previous mark of 670,702 set in 2019. Overall this spring, 1.25 million birds were counted.

Abraham Kanz, director of conservation research for the Crane Trust, said the huge influx was driven by weather and dry conditions to the south. The birds overwinter in Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico and Arizona.

"We do know from research that drought heavily impacts when the cranes migrate," he said. "They congregate in significant numbers throughout the central Platte River valley in conjunction with southerly winds, utilizing winds that favor movement in their preferred migrating direction. The migration typically lasts throughout eight weeks from mid-February through mid-April. However, the peak numbers are always ever-changing."

The count, done through weekly flight estimates, was 583,000 the week before and then dropped to fewer than 400,000 for week eight as the birds stopped to feed and rest and then continued to their nesting grounds in the northern United States, Canada and Siberia.

Another number, significantly lower, was equally as important. Kanz said there were no confirmed cases of bird flu among the sandhill cranes in the Central Flyway, which includes Nebraska.

In the Eastern Flyway, meanwhile, about 1,500 to 2,700 cranes died in Indiana in February and March from the H5N1 strain of the flu. The International Crane Foundation said it was the largest number of cranes to succumb to the disease in North America.

Kanz said he's not sure why the disease seemed to have skipped the larger number of cranes traveling through the central part of the United States. With limited testing done on cranes, there were no mass die-offs observed in the Central Flyway. However, bird flu has been seen in other bird species in this area.

"There were geese and ducks that were documented as having had bird flu in the Central Flyway. People did notice individual birds acting strange or that had died; however, there is always some level of mortality during migration due to several factors," he said. "It's very probable to be in different flocks of birds. Some may have immunity, while others may not. It's just hard to confirm what levels are in the central migratory corridor."

In a first since around 2000, the science team at the Crane Trust in Wood River started tracking the birds to determine how far they travel from the Platte River to forage. They'll also look at the birds' use of different habitats and if they are seeing shifts in the migration.

Working with U.S. Geological Survey and the International Crane Foundation, GPS trackers were attached to five birds. That total could grow to 15 next spring, Kanz said.

A team of seven used leg nooses to snare the birds in their feeding grounds, placed the trackers on their legs above the knee, took a quick blood draw and did some measurements.

"The trackers should last anywhere from two to five years on the birds themselves," Kanz said. "Ideally, we'll get a whole five years of data. When you place something on an animal and you let them go, you never know what can happen."

Kanz said overall it was a good year at the Crane Trust, which attracted about 25,000 visitors.

The migration also was a success for Rowe Sanctuary in Gibbon, which just opened its renovated visitors center this spring.

Over the 40 days of crane season, staff members saw 20,000 visitors and offered 90 programs, covering topics such as crane behavior basics, art workshops, speaker series and 50th anniversary celebrations.

With its newly accessible trails, wheelchair users were able to go directly to the viewing blinds without the need for any additional assistance.

"Tens of thousands of visitors from all over the country and world experienced the magic of migration through our new visitor's center," director Marcos Stoltzfus said. "Many were seeing the birds for the very first time, a bucket list item for them. We couldn't be more pleased with the building and the amenities it provides to visitors."



MATTHEW URBANSKI

Dave Brandt, left, and Abraham Kanz attach a GPS tracker to a sandhill crane. They will try to determine how far the birds travel from the Platte River to forage for food.

JARED BARTON, THE COLUMBUS TELEGRAM

Hy-Vee's Market Grille fries

## Barton

From A1

very fresh. I want to say they made it about a half hour before they got kind of floppy and cold, so huge bonus points here. As previously mentioned, they didn't have a strong oily flavor either, which contributes to this score.

### Standalone — 6/10

I have to say, as much as I did enjoy these, I wouldn't have gotten them if I weren't reviewing them and getting something else. Oddly enough, I did get ketchup with them and I don't know that they need it. I think they're fine without ketchup, but do think they need something else to go with them like a sandwich or some fried chicken or something.

### Overall: 7.95

As always, these are just opinions, don't come at me with pitchforks or anything. I'm curious to hear your thoughts and I'm always scouting new locations and ask that you send your Columbus-area fry recommendations to jared.barton@lee.net.