

Tribal leader highlights threats facing Wisconsin tribes, calls for action to protect water

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The chairwoman of the Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians today said the federal government is “testing the fundamentals of a healthy democracy.”

Chairwoman Nicole Boyd during today’s State of the Tribes address touched on a variety of topics, such as health care access, gun control, protecting the state’s natural resources, cannabis legalization and combating the crisis of missing and murdered indigenous women.

Boyd said 2025 can be described in acronyms as the year of DOGE, ICE, DEI and RIF, or reductions in force. She did not name President Donald Trump directly during her remarks.

“We have been resiliently working to ensure the health and wellbeing of our constituents, shielding them from attacks on human decency and the disruption of everything they know as normal,” Boyd said. “Not everyone in this room may agree that we are in very unprecedented times. But indigenous people, sadly, we know these tactics all too well.”

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Boyd cited threats to tribal sovereignty, staffing for the Indian Health Service and Head Start programs as examples. She praised tribal leaders and Attorney General Josh Kaul for fighting back.

Also during the speech, Boyd asked lawmakers to name manoomin — wild rice — the official state grain and condemned Enbridge’s Line 5 oil pipeline in northern Wisconsin.

“As a mother, an Anishinaabe woman, I beg you to join us in protecting the very resources that brought you, me, our children, our grandchildren and future generations into this world,” Boyd said. “Without safe water, we will not survive. Think about the legacy you will leave behind when you tell people: ‘I protected the water.’”

Enbridge has sought to relocate a 12-mile segment of Line 5 and build a new 41-mile segment around the Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa reservation after a federal judge in 2022 ruled Enbridge had illegally trespassed on the tribe’s land.

The Bad River Band has sought to block the reroute, arguing it jeopardizes the tribe’s natural resources, including wildlife, bodies of water and wild rice beds.

Boyd also urged lawmakers to pass bipartisan legislation that would pave the way for online betting on tribal lands in Wisconsin.

Current law only allows gaming in Wisconsin on tribal lands. AB 601 would allow online bets so long as they went through servers on tribal lands. The bill is based on a “hub and spoke system” used in Florida that has been upheld by the federal courts.

The Assembly put the legislation on its Nov. 19 calendar but pulled it amid pressure from conservatives who opposed the bill. Assembly Majority Leader Tyler August, one of the bill’s co-authors, last week said he expects the legislation to pass before the chamber adjourns by Feb. 19.

[Watch the full State of the Tribes address here.](#)