



Sandra Kennedy at the Mesa Martin Luther King Jr. banquet dinner in Mesa on Jan. 19. (Photo special to Independent Newsmedia Inc. USA byPaige Owen.)

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Sandra Kennedy in her Jan. 19 speech at the [Mesa Martin Luther King Jr. banquet dinner](#) recognized those in the community who contribute to its success but stressed, “our work must continue, because we are not done.”

Ms. Kennedy, who served as a [commissioner](#) on the Arizona Corporation Commission, linked her speech and theme of the event, “One Community, Many Faces,” to Dr. King. In his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, he acknowledged the many faces of the community that he was a part of, said Ms. Kennedy, and therefore she would do the same.

Education was a key part of Ms. Kennedy’s speech as she stressed its importance throughout. The speech was held at the Windemere Hotel and Conference Center, 5750 E. Main St. in east Mesa.

“Education is a lifelong work and goal. So those who work to increase and make all educational opportunities available

to all people make our one community better,” said Ms. Kennedy.

Yet she continued to impress upon the crowd of around 200 that there was more work to be done.

“Even today in Arizona, there are issues of segregation and adequate and equal school funding,” said Ms. Kennedy.

In the most recent school year report, 2009-10, the Federal Education Budget Project found a 12.3 percent disparity in funding per pupil across districts in Arizona.

Ms. Kennedy felt it was important for her to speak because she was a part of the legislature that, with others, went through in creating Martin Luther King Jr. Day. Arizona was the only state that had to get voter approval in order to have a holiday in honor of Dr. King, and Ms. Kennedy feels there is still more to be done in the government.

“You know, I look at the political climate and I wonder ‘Are we going backwards? We’re not going forwards,’ because when you look at our political structure you really don’t see people of color holding political office unless it is in an area where you’ve got a majority demographic. It would be good for everyone to come together and allow those people to participate in the political process and speak out,” said Ms. Kennedy.

According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, 17 percent of Arizona’s legislature demographic is non-Caucasian. Two percent are African American, 3 percent Native American, 14 percent Hispanic, and none are Asian. Among other top posts in Arizona including governor, secretary of state, superintendent of public instruction, and attorney general, all are held by Caucasian males.

Ms. Kennedy highlighted those who volunteer in elections, charitable organizations, and to causes of civil rights among others in her speech.

With her experience as commissioner taking into account the interests of the people as a whole and not just a select group, Ms. Kennedy was an ideal speaker choice, said committee Chairman Cliff Moon.

The speech started with Ms. Kennedy highlighting some of Dr. King’s teachings and legacy, which quickly engaged the crowd.

“Dr. King made his agenda very clear. ‘I have the audacity to believe that people everywhere can have three meals a day for their bodies, education and culture for their minds, and dignity and quality and freedom for their spirits,’” said Ms. Kennedy.

An “amen” rippled through the crowd as people nodded their heads in agreement.

Tori Tobin, who sang at the dinner, said Ms. Kennedy spoke right to her heart.

“To look around and see such diversity, and we’re all striving for the same thing, it gives you a really good feeling. She definitely brought it home and made some really good points about what we need to do,” said Ms. Tobin.

Volunteers from around the community came out to show their support. Westwood High School JROTC honor guard volunteered by giving the presentation of the colors under the supervision of Maj. Edward Greer. Artist Richard Booker held an art sale with 50 percent of the proceeds being donated back to the committee for next year. The committee receives support from the Mesa Police Department and city officials as well. Also in attendance were four students of Mesa Community College who were awarded \$500 scholarships by the committee to further their education.