Good morning! My name is Amber Poleviyuma, I am Hopi from the village of Munqapi in Northern Arizona. I am a senior here at Arizona State University studying Community Health. Before I begin, I want to acknowledge and thank the original inhabitants of this land, the Akimel O’odham people for allowing us to gather here this morning.

I am honored to be selected for this award. Dr. King was a voice for his community and united people in his beliefs for social justice and equality. He stood up during a time that it was extremely difficult to do so, but he did it because he realized the consequences of not standing up would be far worse. However, he must remember that even though this day honors him in name, he did not work alone. He partnered with people from many different walks of life, from religious institutions, community members, and to other local activists to ensure the success of such a great endeavor. With the collective support and work, they pushed forward the civil rights movement to catalyze the change that allowed many of us to sit here together today.
This is why it is such an honor to have been selected as a recipient of an award made in his name and to be speaking in front of so many existing and budding leaders. Like, Dr. King, I did not get here alone. There are a plethora of individuals who have motivated and helped me to put forth my best effort and do the best I can for my people. But, today I would like to thank my nominators, Dr. Jessica Solyom, Assistant Research Professor at the Center for Indian Education and Dr. Bryan Brayboy, who is the President’s Professor and Special Advisor to the President on American Indian Affairs. Both who have been fantastic mentors and change makers in the American Indian community. I would also like to thank my family, namely Itangu, Janie Kewenvoyouma, and my Gwa’ah, Harmon Kewenvoyouma who I know is watching over us today, for being my support and role models in giving back.

It is because of my people, all those who have come before me and all those who will come after me, that I choose to serve. Growing up around my grandfather, I was taught about the strength of my Hopi people when it came preserving our way of life and our homelands, beginning with our journey on this land and now continuing with retaining our rights and resources. I also saw this resilience in people like my mother, who worked hard every day as a single mother and student until she received her Master’s degree in Social Work (from ASU). In my
community, I saw people like my Gwa’ah and mom, and realized that no matter what we were going through; we made it through with the support of one another, our community, and our culture. I come from a long line of survivors and social justice advocates, so there is no way that giving back will end with me.

Dr. King said, “Our nation was born in genocide when it embraced the doctrine that the original American, the Indian, was an inferior race”. He knew, we know: that such doctrine is not true. However, we must continue to fight for justice. To continue to not only survive, but thrive. We must come together and work toward a better, more just future. One where we can see that water rights is not only an issue in our Native communities, like in Standing Rock, but are issues in communities like Flint, Michigan. That the issues of police violence are not limited to the Black community, they also affect the American Indian community and the Latino community. Such issues, even if they effected ONE of us, ultimately affect all of us. That’s why it is important for us – now more than ever-to not only support each other but to collaborate to continue to work toward civil rights and social justice. In Hopi, we say “Nahongvita” which is a way of saying “exert yourself” or “keep going”. To the students who wrote the beautiful, inspiring essays that won the writing contest, Nahongvita. You will all go far. To the leaders, Lattie and Elva Coor, thank you for your hard work and dedication,
Nahongvita. Askwali to the ASU Martin Luther King Jr. Committee and staff who made today possible, Nahongvita.