

behind the Embrace Hope event is about stepping up and saying as individuals that we can do more if we do it together.

The Embrace Hope community event in Lawton will offer Oklahomans an opportunity to access a lot of free services and some basic help. There are partners from all over the State of Oklahoma who have donated their time, their services, their finances to help those in need all over Southwest Oklahoma—all in one place, all at one time. If someone needs housing—shelter, information, or a referral, food—there will be folks there who can help them.

There will be agencies there to talk about long-term needs and people needing short-term needs. If someone needs a job, there will be folks there who will show them opportunities for hiring. If someone needs to get their resume together so they can get a job, there will be folks there who can take a picture so they can use it with their resume. In fact, if folks need a suit to wear to an interview, there will be folks there to help them get a suit so they are able to prepare themselves for a job.

There will be health services there. You can schedule an appointment with a local health center, and there will also be ways to get dental services, optometry, pregnancy resources, or even a breast exam, if that is needed.

There will be folks there who can give them a haircut if they need a haircut and haven't been able to get access to that.

There will be folks there who are mental health professionals and counselors so they can interact with folks who may struggle with substance abuse or dealing with the stress of life. There will be folks there who can help them with legal assistance. These are communities coming together; ministries, churches, organizations, and government agencies are all coming to one place at one time to help.

There are a lot of needs in the area. In fact, in Oklahoma, according to DHS statistics just from this last year, we had 78,000-plus households that needed winter heating assistance in our State. More than 378,000 Oklahomans receive food benefits, like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. These are Federal resources and Federal programs.

As Members of Congress, we work together to help in whatever way we can to help those in greatest need to be lifted out of poverty and to be able to walk through some of their low points in life. But a government check or a check-in with a Federal entity is no substitute for a neighbor helping a neighbor. When you are at your low point of life, a check is helpful to get you through a hard time, but you need a person; you need a mentor; you need a friend; you need a neighbor.

The Embrace Hope event is all about that. It is neighbors helping each other to be able to walk through this process, but it is also about opportunities for

people who live in Southwest Oklahoma. It is not just to help someone one day, but also to understand that we could do this throughout the course of the year because there are lots of folks who say: I want to be able to help.

They just don't know where to go to be able to help their neighbors. They might help the folks who are around them; they might help people in a small group at their church; they might have family members they help, but they say that they want to be able to do more.

The Embrace Hope event allows volunteers by the hundreds who have signed up to serve their neighbor one day, but it also allows them to take a test drive with a bunch of other ministries and nonprofits in the area and say: What do you do that I can volunteer one day to help people, but maybe I can plug in and help you at other times?

It allows those nonprofits and ministries to reach out to a whole pool of people, who maybe are not involved all the time, to say: If you enjoyed helping your neighbor that day, why don't you come work with us the rest of the year?

It is a way for them to meet each other. Quite frankly, it is a way for us to build a stronger State, a stronger community, and stronger connections with our neighbors so that we don't default by saying "They get help from the government, so that is probably all they need," when we know in our heart it is not. They need help from somebody local. They need a friend, and they need somebody who can look them in the face and say: How can we help? That is Embrace Hope.

There have been hundreds of people who have volunteered already, and as they are preparing for this Saturday, it will probably be a cold and wet day, which is a perfect day to help people in need.

As we get together on this Saturday with all the volunteers and all the folks, there will be one person who will be in the background whom the whole event will circle around, but a lot of folks will not know it. Her name is Brenda Spencer-Ragland. She is the lead event coordinator for Embrace Hope. I can't even imagine how many hundreds of hours she has put in behind the scenes to be able to bring this to reality. Her title is event coordinator, but that title doesn't remotely do justice for the work she has done to bring Embrace Hope to reality.

She is one of those incredible individuals who everyone wishes lived around them, but Southwest Oklahoma actually has her. She has a servant's heart and a servant's attitude. It is who she is, quite frankly, more than just what she does.

Brenda served our Nation as a civilian with the U.S. Army for 32 years before assuming her current role. She was Director of the Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation Program at Fort Sill in Lawton. Her title was a

fancy way of saying that she took care of military families in whatever way she possibly could, and she did it well. She loved serving those who serve us. On her retirement, she grieved because she loved serving those folks at the post.

Now, after dealing with morale at Fort Sill and after serving also as the Housing Director at Fort Sill, she has found a new way to serve—Embrace Hope. She has built around that same mission. She came to Oklahoma City, and she saw an event called Love OKC, which was similar to this. She brought a whole group of volunteers to come take a look at what was happening in Oklahoma City and the remarkable Love OKC event that has happened for 7 years in a row. She took that vision back to Southwest Oklahoma and created Embrace Hope. Meeting after meeting, donor after donor, long night after long night of organizing—it is about to happen.

Brenda, for all of the folks in Lawton who don't know you, they should because, if they did, they would give you a warm hug and a very grateful thank-you for blessing so many people. Thank you for answering the call to serve your friends and neighbors and stepping up when you saw a need and tirelessly giving back to Southwest Oklahoma and the community that you love. It is an honor to call you a friend and a neighbor. I look forward to serving alongside you this weekend in Embrace Hope, doing whatever you need me to do to help you as we love our neighbors together.

God bless you. I look forward to seeing you there, Brenda. I love getting a chance to be able to brag about what is happening in the great Southwest Oklahoma.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. LANKFORD. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNIZING THE ST. MICHAEL'S COLLEGE FIRE AND RESCUE SQUAD

Mr. LEAHY. Madam President, I want to take a moment to recognize the brave and selfless individuals from the St. Michael's College Fire and Rescue Squad, based in Colchester, VT. These young men and women respond to emergencies on a moment's notice to help those in need—all while balancing the demands of their full college course load. St. Michael's College Fire and Rescue helps bring a greater degree of safety to residents in Chittenden County, and we are thankful for their efforts. Today, I would like