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"Veterans"

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* "required information"
A veteran is a police officer driving her patrol car through the neighborhood, who spent six months in Saudi Arabia making sure armored personnel carriers didn't run out of fuel.

Our country's veterans have sacrificed a lot for our country. We must never overlook that sacrifice. And one way - one small way - we can show our appreciation for their noble endeavors, is to live up to our promise of quality health care.

To that end, I have invited the VA’s top health care official to join us in discussing veterans’ needs.
As you know, the VA health care system has changed a great deal in recent years, moving from essentially a hospital-based system to one in which vets outpatient visits are stressed.

The Whitefish VA Clinic opened in 1994, and has experienced steady traffic ever since. Visits are expected to increase from just over 9,400 last year to more than 11,100 this year.

In the last fiscal year, nearly 19,500 Montana veterans received health care from the VA, compared with just over 18,000 in the year previous - an increase of over 7 percent.
But despite these improvements in access to care, we still have work to do. Efficiency is not an unmitigated good. Vets have told me that waiting times to get in the VA system are long, sometimes in the range of over 6 months.

I have also heard from vets frustrated that the VA cannot fill prescriptions from their primary care doctor.

I hope we can shed some light on some of these issues today, and have a good discussion about where to go from here.
So without further ado, let me introduce to you our special guest.

Dr. Thomas Garthwaite has been with the VA since 1995, and last May was nominated to be VA Under Secretary for Health, basically the CEO of VA health care.

On September 8 he was confirmed by the Senate, and next year will be responsible for a budget of $20.3 billion. He oversees 180,000 staff, 172 medical centers, over 650 ambulatory care and community based clinics and 134 nursing homes.
His is not an easy job, and I commend him for making it to Montana for his first site visit as Under Secretary for Health.

Let's give a Big Sky welcome to Dr. Thomas Garthwaite.