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Health and Human Services (HHS) Speeches

REMARKS BY: TOMMY G. THOMPSON, SECRETARY OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES  
PLACE: Press Conference on Organ Donation, Washington, D.C.  
DATE: April 22, 2002

Organ Donation: The Gift of Life

Good afternoon. Welcome, everyone, to the Department of Health and Human Services. Thank you for coming.

We're here today to kick off National Organ and Tissue Donor Awareness Week. With me today are:

Chris Klug, bronze medal-winning Olympian at the Salt Lake Games;

Arthur Mayer, Jr., national president of the ELKS;

Derek Harps, vice-president at AllFirst Bank

Dr. Clive Callender, founder of the National Minority Organ Tissue Transplant Education Program;

Karen Garcia, Chairperson of the Coalition on Donation, Hispanic Campaign Committee.

Thank you all for your commitment to increasing awareness about the need for organ and tissue donors.

As many of you know, I am passionate about the issue of organ donation.

And you can be certain that my commitment to organ donation is as strong as ever.

I'm so committed that one of my first acts as Secretary was to create the Gift of Life Donation Initiative. We are increasing awareness and promoting organ, tissue, marrow and blood donation.

This month marks the first anniversary of this campaign.

And, I'm pleased to tell you that the number of organ donors increased almost 7 percent last year.

Here's what a 7 percent increase means. Because of someone's selfless act of love and compassion, an additional 1,000 people who needed transplants last year, got them.

There also was a 13 percent increase in African-American donors, and a nearly 14 percent increase in Hispanic donors.

This is so important -- because almost half of those waiting for organ transplants represent minorities.

We must continue to reach out to our minority communities -- to reach them with the message that organ donation saves lives.

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We have with us two speakers who will talk about the particular needs of the minority community, including a new national campaign targeted to Hispanics. But, we must not be satisfied. We must continue moving forward to reach all Americans about the lifesaving gift donation.

I want to remind you of some striking numbers:

Almost 80,000 Americans are waiting for organ transplants.

About 65 people a day receive an organ transplant.

But, 16 people die every day waiting for an organ.

One of the key parts of the Gift of Life campaign is the Workplace Partnership for Life.

Workplace Partners are just that -- our partners. They're reaching their employees and members about the urgent need for organ donors.

We started with 18 companies. Our goal was to sign up at least 1,000 companies the first year.

Today, I am so proud to report that we not only met our goal -- we surpassed it. We now have nearly 1,100 Workplace Partners!

Eleven hundred partners means that up to 60 million Americans will know about organ donation.

And the list of Workplace Partners keeps growing. Our goal is to have 5,000 Workplace Partners by this time next year.

I thank all of our partners for their leadership.

The other parts of the Gift of life campaign are:

A model organ donor card, so it's easy to share your decision to be an organ donor;

A model curriculum for driver's education -- so more drivers will learn about organ donation;

A national forum on organ donor registries, to look at ways to improve the system; and

The Gift of Life Awards, which honor organ donors.

We also have an organ donor website --[organdonor.gov](http://organdonor.gov) -- which gets about 40,000 hits a month.

This is just the start. We're creating a donation-friendly America -- and we're starting right here at HHS.

We've started a marrow education program, and we're going to hold marrow drives to register potential donors.

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Today, here at the Humphrey building, employees will be able to give a blood sample and register.

Also, I'm please to say that soon, all HHS employees will be able to list their decision to donate on their ID card.

And, I'm asking all of my Cabinet colleagues to do the same thing in their Departments -- so we reach all federal employees about organ donation.

I want to take a moment and thank Kay Coles James, Director of the Office of Personnel Management.

Director James will help me promote donation throughout the federal government. I look forward to working with her and my colleagues on this issue.

There is something else each of you can do ... something very simple.

You can sign an organ donor card. Or, you can put it on your driver's license.

But most important of all -- you must share your decision. It's just as important as making the decision itself.

I know that it can be uncomfortable to talk to your loved ones about what to do if something should happen.

But please, just do it.

Sign up to be an organ donor. And then tell your loved ones you did it. And now, it is my pleasure to introduce Olympian Chris Klug.

Chris is alive today because someone gave him the gift of life. Thank you, Chris, for sharing your story with us, and for being such a committed advocate for donation.

Chris . . .

Thank you, Chris.

And now, let's welcome Arthur Mayer, Jr., from the ELKS, which is one of our committed Workplace Partners.

Arthur . . .

Thank you, Arthur.

Now, let's welcome Derek Harps with AllFirst Bank, another dedicated Workplace Partner.

Derek . . .

Thank you, Derek.

And now, we have Dr. Clive Callender from the National Minority Organ Tissue Transplant Education Program.

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Dr. Callender . . .

Thank you, Dr. Callender.

Now, I'm pleased to introduce Karen Garcia of the Coalition on Donation  
Hispanic Campaign Committee.

Karen . . .

Thank you, Karen.

I thank all of our guests for joining me today, and I invite all of you to  
register for the marrow drive.