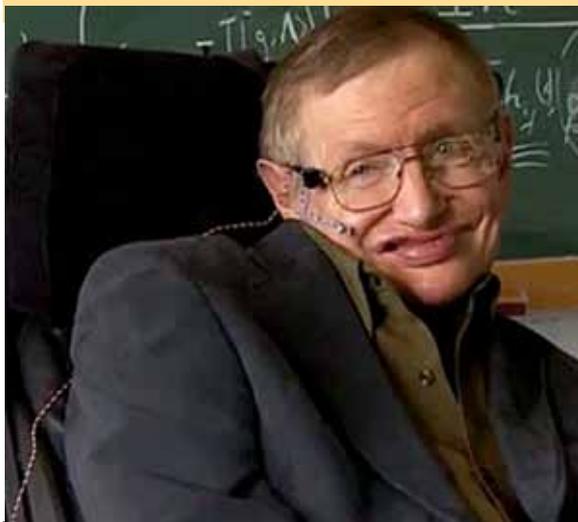


# Heroes

*of the Disability Arena*



governor's  
council on  
people  
with disabilities

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**“ I shall seize Fate by the throat;  
it shall certainly not bend and  
crush me completely. ”**

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# Ludwig van Beethoven

Ludwig van Beethoven

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Ludwig van Beethoven was a classical composer born in Bonn, Germany in 1770. He gave his first public concert at age 7-1/2 years old. Early on, he developed a hearing disorder that eventually claimed his hearing in 1800. He also suffered from bipolar disorder. Despite his disabilities, Beethoven continued to compose music until his death in 1827. He was regarded by many to be a musical genius.

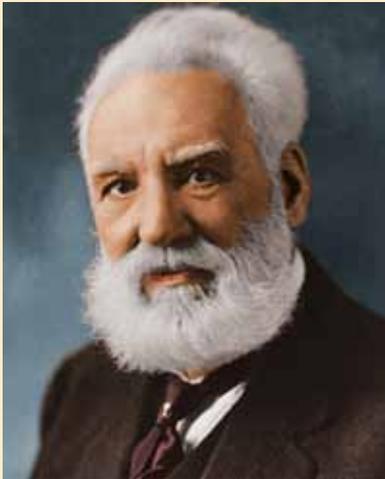
“ Sometimes we stare so long at  
a door that is closing that we  
see too late the one that is open.”

---

## Alexander Graham Bell

Alexander Graham Bell

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American Alexander Graham Bell, born in 1847 in Edinburg, Scotland, was most noted as the inventor of the telephone. He also was the first to conduct research into heredity, and why people are born deaf. His mother and wife were both deaf. Bell also studied why sheep are born with irregularities. Another of his inventions was an early precursor to the iron lung, a machine that later aided people who had polio. Bell had a learning disability and as he aged, he also lost his hearing.

“

”

I want to give a little education about having a disability, about treating other people with disabilities like everybody else, that kind of stuff. I'm not the first, but I'm certainly one of the folks trying to do that. It takes more than one person. I hope that I've knocked some bricks out of the wall and shown a bit of the mainstream U.S. that people with disabilities are still that – people.

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## Josh Blue

Josh Blue

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American comedian Josh Blue, born in Cameroon, Africa in 1978, grew up in St. Paul, Minnesota. He was the 2006 winner of NBC's *"Last Comic Standing."* Blue has cerebral palsy, and much of his self-deprecating humor is centered on this. He was part of the 2004 U.S. Paralympics soccer team. Blue also has created various sculptures and paintings which are for sale.

**“ Having Down syndrome is like being born normal. I am just like you and you are just like me. We are all born in different ways, that is the way I can describe it. I have a normal life. ”**

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## **Chris Burke**

Chris Burke

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Chris Burke is an actor and folk singer who was born with Down syndrome. His first acting job was in 1987. ABC executives were impressed by his performance and created the program *“Life Goes On”* with the main character of Charles “Corky” Thatcher for Burke to play. Burke’s role conveyed a realistic portrayal of a person with Down syndrome and changed the way audiences viewed people with disabilities. Burke has been the Goodwill Ambassador for the National Down Syndrome Society since 1994.

“ Learning to read music in Braille  
and play by ear, helped me  
develop a damn good memory.”

---

## Ray Charles

Ray Charles

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Musician and singer Ray Charles, born in 1930, lost his sight by age seven due to glaucoma. Despite his disability, he became a famous musical icon with his music spanning the genres of R&B, soul, gospel, blues, rock, country and jazz. Some of his most popular songs include, *“Georgia, On My Mind,”* *“America the Beautiful,”* and *“What I’d Say.”* He died at age 73 in 2004.

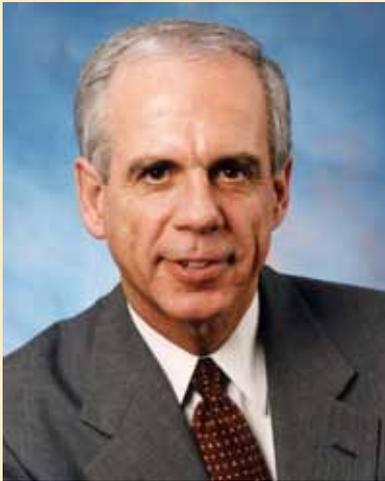
**“ When I authored the Americans with Disabilities Act, it was because of my own experiences. ”**

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## **Tony Coelho**

Tony Coelho

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Tony Coelho served in the U.S. Congress from 1978 to 1989, and authored the Americans with Disabilities Act. He also served under President Bill Clinton as chairman of the President’s Committee on the Employment of People with Disabilities. He was diagnosed with epilepsy as a young man and personally experienced discrimination due to his disability. He is currently chairman of the Board of Directors of the Epilepsy Foundation.

**“ I count the good days in my life from the time I got polio. These beautiful people not only saved my life, they made it worth saving. ”**

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## **Justin Dart, Jr.**

Justin Dart, Jr.

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Justin Dart, Jr. was a long-time advocate of people with disabilities and was regarded as the father of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). He was present when President Bush signed the ADA into law in 1990. He was also known for his trademark cowboy hat and boots, which now reside in the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. along with his pen that signed the ADA, and his Presidential Medal of Freedom, which he received in 1998. He served five presidents in the area of disability policy. Dart had post-polio syndrome and used a wheelchair. He died in 2002, at the age of 71.

**“ Vocational rehabilitation represents  
a critical part of what we pride ourselves  
on as a great nation: opportunity for all.**”

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## **Bob Dole**

Bob Dole

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Former Republican Senator Bob Dole represented his state of Kansas in both the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate. A disabled World War II veteran, he was badly wounded in 1945 and was awarded two Purple Hearts, and a Bronze Star with Oak Leaf Cluster. The injuries he received paralyzed his right arm. He ran briefly for president in 1980, and was his party's nominee for president in 1988.

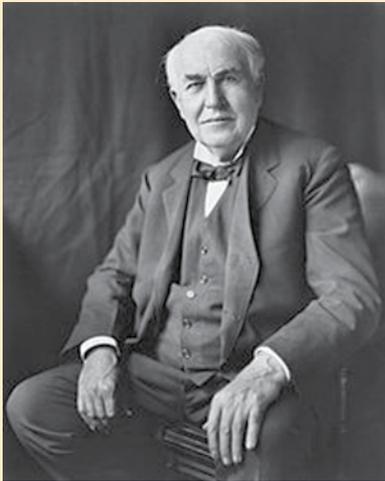
“ Genius is one percent inspiration and ninety-nine percent perspiration. ”

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## Thomas Alva Edison

Thomas Alva Edison

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Thomas Alva Edison was born in 1847 in Milan, Ohio. An early bout with scarlet fever left him with hearing difficulties in both ears. A hyperactive child, prone to distraction, he was deemed “difficult” by his teacher. Edison had attention deficit disorder and a learning disability. Despite his disabilities, he invented the phonograph, the lightbulb and the world’s first economically viable system of centrally generating and distributing electric light, heat and power. It became the Edison General Electric Company, later known as General Electric Corporation.

**“ Weakness of attitude becomes  
weakness of character. ”**

---

# **Albert Einstein**

## Albert Einstein

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German-born physicist Albert Einstein, was one of the greatest scientists of all time. He was born in 1879 and had a learning disability. Einstein developed the special and general theories of relativity. In 1921, he won the Nobel Prize for physics for his explanation of the photoelectric effect. Einstein is generally considered the most influential physicist of the 20th century. He died in 1955 in Princeton, New Jersey.

“ One’s dignity may be assaulted,  
vandalized and cruelly mocked,  
but cannot be taken away  
unless it is surrendered.”

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## Michael J. Fox

Michael J. Fox

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Michael J. Fox, born in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada in 1961, is an actor, author, producer, activist and voice-over artist. He is best known for his TV role as Alex Keaton in *“Family Ties,”* and for his role as Marty McFly in the *“Back to the Future”* movie trilogy. Fox was diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease in 1991. He became an advocate for Parkinson’s research and created the Michael J. Fox Foundation. In 2010, he received a *Honoris causa* doctorate from Sweden’s Karolinska Institutet for his work in advocating a cure for Parkinson’s disease.

“ As we advance in life it becomes more and more difficult, but in fighting the difficulties the inmost strength of the heart is developed.”

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## Vincent van Gogh

Vincent van Gogh

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Artist Vincent van Gogh lived from 1853-1890 in The Netherlands. Some of his most famous works include *“Starry Night”* and his series of *“Sunflower”* paintings. Van Gogh was believed to have had epilepsy and may also have suffered from mental illness throughout his life. He was a prolific artist and vibrant colors were a constant in his works.

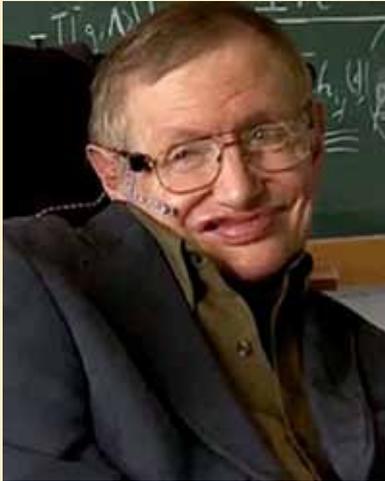
“ Intelligence is the ability  
to adapt to change.”

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## Stephen Hawking

Stephen Hawking

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Physicist Stephen Hawking was born in Oxford, England in 1942. In 1963, he was diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, also known as Lou Gehrig's disease. Even though his future looked bleak, he continued with his education and completed his doctorate in 1966. In 1977, he was the first professor of Gravitational Physics at Cambridge University. He is an Honorary Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts, a lifetime member of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences and a recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian award in the United States.

“Independent Living is not doing things by yourself, it is being in control of how things are done.”

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## Judy E. Heumann

Judy E. Heumann

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Judy Heumann, born in 1947, contracted polio at the age of 18 months, which left her unable to use her legs. She wanted to be a teacher, but was automatically disqualified from teaching in New York schools because she used a wheelchair. She won her case in court and taught children with disabilities. She later became Assistant Secretary for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services in the United States and co-founded the World Institute on Disability, the first research center to focus on disability issues.

**“ Never bend your head. Hold it high.  
Look the world straight in the eye. ”**

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## **Helen Keller**

Helen Keller

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Helen Keller was born in Alabama in 1880 and lost her vision and hearing at age 19 months. Just shy of age seven, she began being tutored by educator Annie Sullivan, who taught her to communicate with others using her hands. Keller was a well-known author and scholar. She graduated cum laude from Radcliffe College and received honorary doctoral degrees from Temple University, Harvard University and numerous European universities.

**“ Madam Speaker, I rise in strong support of the ADA Amendments Act. ”**

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## **Jim Langevin**

Jim Langevin

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U.S. Representative Jim Langevin, born in 1964, has risen through the ranks of Rhode Island government as a member of its legislature, then as Secretary of State – the youngest ever elected in the nation. He was elected to Congress in 2000 and is the first person with quadriplegia to serve in that elective office. Langevin is an outspoken proponent of universal health care and for advancing the science of stem cell research.

**“ When I was a kid, I didn't know anybody who went to a psychiatrist. There was always a stigma attached to mental health issues. I think there still is. But now I'm taking care of myself. ”**

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## **Howie Mandel**

Howie Mandel

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Canadian comedian and actor Howie Mandel, born in 1955, is best known as a stand-up comedian and as the host of the game show, *“Deal or No Deal.”* Mandel has obsessive/compulsive disorder and mysophobia, an irrational fear of dirt and germs. He cannot shake hands with anyone without wearing gloves; he prefers to bump fists instead. His shaved head is not due to hair loss, he shaves it because it makes him feel cleaner. He began his acting career as ER intern Dr. Wayne Fiscus on the medical drama *“St. Elsewhere”* and is the creator and star of the children's cartoon, *“Bobby's World.”* Currently, he is a judge on *“America's Got Talent.”*

**“ Individually and collectively, Cherokee people possess an extraordinary ability to face down adversity and continue moving forward. ”**

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## **Wilma Mankiller**

Wilma Mankiller

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Even though Wilma Mankiller, born in 1945, was diagnosed with the muscle disease myasthenia gravis in 1980, she became the principal chief of the Cherokee Nation in 1985 and was elected chief two years later. She remained in that position until 1995. She was presented the Presidential Medal of Freedom by President Bill Clinton in 1998. Mankiller died in 2010.

**“ Without the ADA I never would  
have been able to pursue my dream  
of playing golf professionally.”**

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## **Casey Martin**

Casey Martin

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Casey Martin, born in 1972, is a professional golfer from Oregon who successfully sued the Professional Golf Association in 2001 for the right to use a golf cart during competition under the Americans with Disabilities Act. Martin has Klippel-Trenaunay-Weber Syndrome, which obstructs blood flow in his right leg and creates a significant risk of hemorrhaging, developing blood clots and fracturing his tibia. He graduated from Stanford with a degree in economics, but he pursued his dream to play professional golf. Martin is currently the Men's golf head coach at the University of Oregon.

“ Every one of us is different in some way, but for those of us who are more different, we have to put more effort into convincing the less different that we can do the same thing they can, just differently.”

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## Marlee Matlin

Marlee Matlin

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Actress Marlee Matlin was born in 1965 and became deaf at 18 months due to a bout with Roseola Infantum. Throughout her life she has pursued acting and received an Academy Award for her film debut, *“Children of a Lesser God”* in 1986. She has advocated for people with disabilities, and took part in the TV program, *“Dancing with the Stars”* in 2008. She serves as a spokesperson for the largest provider of TV Closed Captioning in the country.

“ See with your heart. Music is not just my passion, it’s my companion. ”

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## Ronnie Milsap

Ronnie Milsap

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Ronnie Milsap is a popular country musician and singer who is blind. Ronnie has had a career that includes 40 number one hits primarily during the 1970s, 80s and 90s, but he continues to make music today. Some of his most popular songs include, “*(There’s) No Gettin’ Over Me*,” “*Smokey Mountain Rain*” and “*Any Day Now*.”

**“ Access means getting to a place where everybody else gets to, so you don't have to make special calls to warn them of your arrival. ”**

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## **Itzhak Perlman**

Itzhak Perlman

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Violin virtuoso Itzhak Perlman was born in Israel in 1945, and has appeared on nearly every stage with every symphony in the world. A five-time Emmy Award winner, Perlman contracted polio which caused him to lose the use of his legs at the age of four. In the late 1970s, he became aware of the growing disability rights movement and developed a sense of solidarity with the disability community. Today, he has a busy concert schedule and does fund-raising for organizations of people with disabilities.

“ A hero is an ordinary individual who finds the strength to persevere and endure in spite of overwhelming obstacles. ”

---

## Christopher Reeve

Christopher Reeve

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Actor Christopher Reeve, born in 1952, found himself recast as an advocate for people with disabilities when he had a horseback riding accident that resulted in a spinal cord injury causing quadriplegia in 1995. He is best known for his title role as *“Superman”* in the series of four films starting in 1978. His speaking engagements helped raise millions of dollars for research and nonprofits representing the interests of people with disabilities. He died in 2004.

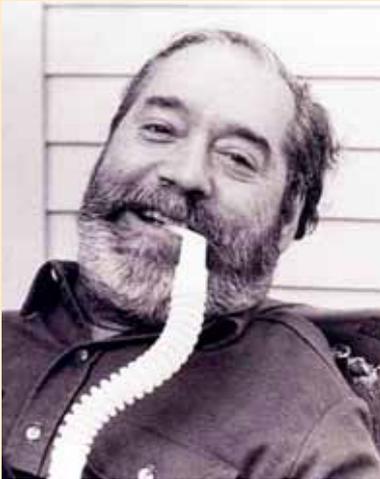
**“ I’m tired of well-meaning  
noncripples with their stereotypes  
of what I can and cannot do  
directing my life and my future.**”

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## **Ed Roberts**

Ed Roberts

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Ed Roberts, known as the father of the disability rights movement, began the Berkeley Center for Independent Living in the early 1970s. In the 1960s, he had been turned away from the vocational rehabilitation agency in California after being deemed too disabled to be employable. In 1975, California Governor Jerry Brown appointed him as director of the state rehabilitation agency. He also co-founded the World Institute on Disability. Roberts died in 1995 at the age of 56.

**“ We cannot always build the future for our youth, but we can build our youth for the future. ”**

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# **Franklin D. Roosevelt**

Franklin D. Roosevelt

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Franklin Delano Roosevelt was born in Hyde Park, New York in 1882; served in the New York State Senate in the early 1900s; and was elected governor of New York in 1928. He was then elected the 32nd President of the United States in 1932, and remained in that role until 1945, the only U.S. president to serve more than two terms. In the early 1920s, he was diagnosed with polio and used a wheelchair throughout his presidency.

**“ Keep on beginning and failing. ”**  
**Each time you fail, start all over again,**  
**and you will grow stronger until you**  
**have accomplished a purpose - not the**  
**one you began with perhaps, but one**  
**you'll be glad to remember.**

---

## **Annie Sullivan**

Annie Sullivan

---



Born in 1866, Annie Sullivan was blind in her early years. After a series of operations, she regained useable sight, but eventually lost her sight in her older years. She began teaching student Helen Keller, who was blind and deaf, in the 1880s. She became highly acclaimed for her abilities to assist Helen. The movie, *“The Miracle Worker,”* documents how Annie taught Helen.

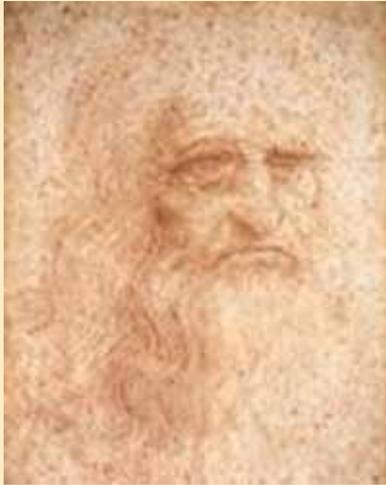
“ The greatest deception men  
suffer is from their own opinions.”

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# Leonardo da Vinci

## Leonardo da Vinci

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Leonardo da Vinci, born in 1452, was one of the greatest painters and most versatile geniuses in history. He was one of the key figures of the Renaissance era. Many of his inventions and scientific ideas were centuries ahead of his time. Some of his most famous paintings were *“Mona Lisa,”* *“The Last Supper”* and *“St. John the Baptist,”* which is believed to be his last painting. Above is a self-portrait of Da Vinci, who had dyslexia and epilepsy. He died in 1519.

**“ Not every person with MS is disabled to the point where they can't communicate or function. What I'd like to try and start making people think differently about is that when they hear someone has MS they don't automatically stereotype them into some picture. ”**

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## **Montel Williams**

Montel Williams

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Montel Williams, born in 1956, is an American television personality, radio talk show host and actor. He has also had careers in the military and motivational speaking. His *"Montel Williams Show"* was watched by millions. He is an advocate for the non-profit Montel Williams MS Foundation, which he founded after being diagnosed with multiple sclerosis in 1999. He is also an advocate for affordable healthcare and prescriptions.





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