

Military, Law, and more ...

The Environment and Conservation

Ernest H. Whitaker Gets a Lifetime Achievement Award for Environmental Stewardship by TDEC

NASHVILLE, TN – Ernest Howard Whitaker, a pioneer in environmental education and community service – and a national inspiration for children learning about the environment – has been named the Robert Sparks Walker Lifetime Achievement Award winner. The award was presented on September 12, 2025 in Nashville.

The award is the top honor in the Governor’s Environmental Stewardship Awards presented by the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC).

“We strive each year to recognize the very best people in protecting our natural resources, and no one is more worthy of such praise than this honoree,” said TDEC Commissioner David Salyers. “He has devoted a lifetime of service with what is obviously a deep, unwavering passion. This award shows our appreciation. We are grateful for all his work.”

Whitaker has devoted more than 70 years to advancing conservation practices and public education. He is especially known for creating two mascots to teach children about the environment. The characters, Sammy Soil and Ruby Raindrop, are used by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to draw attention to conservation. They make public appearances promoting the importance of protecting natural resources.

Whitaker’s work impacts thousands of lives across the country through volunteerism, innovation, and community engagement, but he has had special focus on Tennessee, his home state.

A native of Putnam County, his



Ernest Howard Whitaker

career with the Soil Conservation Service (now the Natural Resources Conservation Service, or NRCS) has spanned multiple Tennessee counties, where he led groundbreaking conservation initiatives.

•In Hamilton County, Whitaker’s work has helped close 20 dangerous abandoned coal mines through federal-state partnerships; engaged regional media to raise public awareness on conservation issues; and co-founded the

Hamilton County Agriculture Fair and Hall of Fame.

•In McMinn County, he engineered animal waste control systems for 160 Grade A dairy farms; directed the \$1 million Chestnut Watershed Project, which focused on flood control and land management; established Tree Day, adopted by the City of Athens for Arbor Day celebrations; and launched the Earth Team, a nationally recognized conservation volunteer group.

•In Meigs County, he influenced the planting of over 2 million trees, significantly enhancing regional biodiversity; founded the Meigs County Lions Club and local Red Cross Blood Bank; and introduced Sammy Soil.

The characters Sammy Soil and Ruby Raindrop were inspired by a dream in 1967. He created Sammy Soil, a cartoon clod of earth with grass for hair, to help children understand the importance of protecting the land. Later, he collaborated with

“We strive each year to recognize the very best people in protecting our natural resources, and no one is more worthy of such praise than this honoree,” said TDEC Commissioner David Salyers. “He has devoted a lifetime of service with what is obviously a deep, unwavering passion. This award shows our appreciation. We are grateful for all his work.”

award-winning cartoonist Bruce Plante to introduce Ruby Raindrop, a cheerful water droplet who teaches water conservation.

The mascots have appeared at White House Earth Day celebrations; the Smithsonian’s “Dig It! The Secrets of Soil” exhibit; and many classrooms, festivals, and community outreach events nationwide. Sammy and Ruby remain central to USDA and NRCS educational programming, delivering messages such as “The soil you save today may keep you from hunger tomorrow.”

Whitaker’s leadership and service has earned him widespread acclaim, including the USDA Superior Service Award (1989); Tennessee Technological University Distinguished Alumnus honor (1991); and the USDA Handicapped Employee of the Year award (1999), stemming from hearing loss from childhood illness.

Whitaker, alongside his wife Nell, has taught English and agriculture to international families. His commitment to education and civic pride continues to influence his children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. Whitaker’s life is an example of how one person can make a difference. His legacy is the inspiration he offers future generations who will carry on his work to protect the environment.

Robert Sparks Walker, namesake of the award, was a founder of the Chattanooga Audubon Society. He turned his childhood home and surrounding farmland into a wildlife sanctuary. Among his writings was “Torchlights to the Cherokees: the Brainerd Mission,” gaining a nomination for the Pulitzer Prize. Walker was editor of the magazine The Southern Fruit Grower and wrote a weekly column in the Chattanooga Times. He died in 1960 at age 82.

Civil Rights Div. files first DOJ affirmative lawsuit in support of gun owners

From DOJ Office of Public Affairs

September 30, 2025 - The Civil Rights Division filed a lawsuit against the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department due to their pattern or practice of infringing the Second Amendment rights of law-abiding citizens seeking concealed carry weapons (CCW) permits. This lawsuit is the first affirmative lawsuit in support of gun owners filed by the U.S. Department of Justice. On March 27, 2025, the Division initiated the first-of-its-kind Second Amendment investigation due to numerous complaints of unreasonable delays in CCW permitting decisions by the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department. After analysis of data and documents spanning over 8,000 CCW permit applications, the Division today filed suit seeking relief on behalf of law-abiding applicants.

“The Second Amendment protects the fundamental constitutional right of law-abiding citizens to bear arms,” said Attorney General Pamela Bondi. “Los Angeles County may not like that right, but the Constitution does not allow them to infringe upon it. This Department of Justice will continue to fight for the Second Amendment.”

“The Second Amendment is not a second-class right,” said Assistant Attorney General Harmeet K. Dhillon of the Justice Department’s Civil Rights Division. “This lawsuit seeks to stop Los Angeles County’s egregious pattern and practice of delaying law-abiding citizens from exercising their right to bear arms.” “Citizens living in high-crime areas cannot afford to wait to protect themselves with firearms while Los Angeles County dithers,” said Acting U.S. Attorney Bill Essayli for the Central District of California. “The right to bear arms is among the founding principles of our nation. It can and must be upheld.”

Shortly after Assistant Attorney General Harmeet K. Dhillon was sworn in to lead the Civil Rights Division, numerous complaints received by the Division revealed inexplicable delays well beyond California statutory requirements and in violation of the U.S. Supreme Court’s interpretation of

Please see sports page 4

SAF announces 2025 award winners at 40th Annual Gun Rights Policy Conference... from sports page 1

orado State Shooting Association Bill of Rights: Recognizes individuals who have made significant contributions to the preservation of civil liberties.

•**Andrew Bailey**, Former Missouri Attorney General, current Co-Deputy Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation Scholar of the Year: Presented to academics and other scholars who have made significant con-

tributions to the history and meaning of the individual right to keep and bear arms.

•**David Kopel**, Research Director of the Independence Institute, Adjunct Scholar at the Cato Institute and Adjunct Professor of Advanced Constitutional Law, Denver University, Sturm College of Law. Journalist of the Year: Recognizes journalists and media

members for their contributions to reporting on gun rights and Second Amendment issues.

•**AWR Hawkins**, Award-winning Second Amendment columnist for Breitbart News and the writer/curator of Down Range with AWR Hawkins. “As in years past, the 2025 award winners are the scholars, advocates and media members who have excelled in promoting

and educating the public about our constitutional right to keep and bear arms,” said SAF Executive Director Adam Kraut. “It was an honor to publicly recognize those who are such staunch advocates of our Second Amendment rights during this year’s GRPC.”

For more information visit SAF.org.

Under President Trump’s leadership, Memphis criminals are facing justice... from sports-military 2

going to enforce,” White House Deputy Chief of Staff Stephen Miller said during a visit last week to the Memphis task force alongside Attorney General Bondi and Secretary of War Hegseth.

For years, Memphians have demanded meaningful action to address the city’s crime crisis. Now, Memphis has all the resources it needs to finally end it.

To accomplish that, however,

we need to make certain that violent criminals are not only arrested, but that they also remain behind bars. In too many cases, soft-on-crime prosecutors and judges have allowed violent criminals back on the streets without bail to continue their criminal activity.

After the Shelby County District Attorney’s Office enacted a policy that made it easier for criminals to avoid pre-trial detention,

residents have suffered tragedy after tragedy. Last year, an 18-year-old who was released without bond after stealing multiple vehicles went on to murder a man in an attempted robbery. Just days earlier, a man released without bail after being charged with auto theft and unlawful possession of a weapon killed a Memphis police officer in a shootout.

During a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing that I chaired last week on “Blue City Chaos and Tragedy,” State Senator Brent Taylor, who represents parts of Memphis, told me that soft-on-crime prosecutors are the “weak link” in the city’s law enforcement efforts, noting that cases tried by local authorities are likely to be dismissed.

After years of senseless violence, we cannot allow the hard work of the Memphis Safe Task Force to go to waste. To ensure that the rule of law is enforced, I recently reintroduced the Keep Violent Criminals Off Our Streets Act, legislation backed by the White House that would ban the award of certain federal funds to states and localities that limit the use of cash bail.

In addition, I’ve introduced

legislation to eliminate cashless bail in Washington, D.C., crack down on carjackers, empower prosecutors to hold violent, repeat offenders accountable, and help keep violent criminals behind bars.

President Trump is making Memphis safe again. With these pieces of legislation, we can ensure that Memphis is the safest city in America.

For The Love Of Springs



Adopt-A-Manatee® today!

1-800-432-JOIN (5646)
savethemanatee.org
Photo © David Schrichte



Matching Donors

YOU DON'T HAVE TO DONATE A KIDNEY TO SAVE A LIFE
DONATE YOUR CAR, BOAT, REAL ESTATE, OR PLANE!

We take donations in any condition, with fast, free pickup.

Every donation is tax deductible.

100% of the proceeds help save the lives of people needing organ transplants on MatchingDonors.com, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.



Call us at 781-821-2204
or donate online at
MatchingDonorsDonations.com