

**For Immediate Release:**  
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**Press Release**

**Rep. Merritt Congratulates Smith Co. Land Owners**

LONGVIEW ~ Today District Judge Jack Skeen dismissed the Smith County land vacancy suit filed by claimants Lewie Byers and Forrest Williams. Judge Skeen issued the dismissal based on the validity of Proposition 8, passed by voters on November 8. Proposition 8 clears the land titles by relinquishing and releasing any state claim to sovereign ownership or title to interest in land involved with the vacancy application in Smith County.

Rep. Merritt commented, "The value of property rights, fairness and good faith prevailed today. It has been a long up hill battle for the land owners in Smith County. Today's news is a tremendous victory for all property rights owners in Texas". Hundreds of individuals have found their land and lives frozen in time, waiting on the outcome of a case that has dragged on for several years.

In 2003 claimants filed a vacancy application affecting 1,000 acres in Smith County. Land Commissioner Jerry Patterson declared no vacancy in the application and the claimants appealed the decision by filing a lawsuit.

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