

Jury vindicates WTVT

The jury's verdict vindicates the station's good name and reputation.

For more than two years, former WTVT reporters Steve Wilson and Jane Akre have been traveling around the world telling anyone who would listen that WTVT management ordered them to falsify a news report on a controversial hormone injected into dairy cows. The jury listened carefully to those claims for five weeks and rejected their multi-million dollar demands. As to the outspoken lead plaintiff Steve Wilson – who has been running a website about an imaginary “WTVT cover-up” – the jury saw right through him, rejecting his lawsuit in its entirety.

The station prevailed in this lawsuit before the court, which threw out Ms. Akre's breach of contract claim, and then before the jury on three of the four issues they were asked to decide. The only issue decided in either plaintiff's favor was Ms. Akre's claim that she was penalized for making a threat to go to the Federal Communications Commission over the station's handling of the hormone story. We do not believe the facts in this case can support such a finding, and we will be pursuing that point immediately before the trial court and, if necessary, the Court of Appeal. The fact is that Ms. Akre's empty threat never concerned the station, because the FCC does not get involved where a reporter is simply resisting editorial input. These reporters know full well that the FCC would never have pursued their claims, a fact made clear by their failure to this day to file any kind of complaint with the FCC, despite the station having challenged them to do so.

The jury's verdict yesterday was a huge step in the right direction. We fully expect to prevail before either the trial court or the Court of Appeals on the narrow remaining issue.

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