Atty. Gen. Jack Gremillion mailed a petition to the U.S. Supreme Court Saturday requesting a judgment that Louisiana owns vast mineral-rich territory in the Gulf of Mexico tidelands.

"That's fine" commented Gov. John McKeithen. "We've been working on that ever since I've been governor."

A favorable court ruling could net billions the state from tidelands oil and gas revenues.

The surprise petition is expected to be filed Monday with the clerk of the Supreme Court in Washington.

The government normally would be given 20 days to file an answer. Gremillion said he expected the court would set the issue for a special hearing later.

The latest Louisiana petition in the 20-year-old tidelands ownership litigation apparently is based on a claim that a coastline set in 1953 by the Coast Guard under an 1895 act of Congress, and ratified in 1954 by the Louisiana Legislature, should be recognized.

State officials protested loudly last summer when the Coast Guard moved to set the coastline much further toward shore.

The Supreme Court in 1960 ruled Louisiana has title to three miles from the coastline, but the state and the federal government never have been able to get together on where to start measuring. This question would be moot if the high court should rule for Louisiana in the new petition.

A favorable ruling also would give Louisiana most of the nearly $1 billion in oil and gas revenues already piled up in an escrow account because of the tidelands ownership fight. The state also would win taxing rights.

Louisiana contends that Congress in 1895 ordered the secretary of the treasury to designate the line dividing high seas from inland waters, and this authority was transferred later to the commandant of the Coast Guard. The state argues the work was completed in 1953.

The state also argues that the 1953 submerged lands act "quitclaimed" to each state the submerged lands within its boundaries, including those within three miles of its coastline.

In the new effort, Louisiana seeks far more territory than ever before.