

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS BUREAU**

BERTHA O JOHNSON
Claimant

APPEAL 17A-UI-02050-TN-T

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

WASHINGTON INVENTORY SERVICES INC
Employer

**OC: 01/08/17
Claimant: Respondent (6)**

Iowa Code §96.6(2) – Untimely Protest
Iowa Code § 17A.12(3) – Default Decision
Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-26.14(7) – Dismissal of Appeal on Default

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

The employer/appellant, Washington Inventory Services Inc, filed an appeal from the unemployment insurance decision issued on February 6, 2017, reference 07. This decision concluded the claimant, Bertha Johnson (aka Bertha Berry), was eligible for unemployment insurance benefits and that the employer/appellant did not submit a timely protest. On February 27, 2017, a Notice of Hearing was mailed to each of the parties' last known addresses of record for a telephone hearing scheduled on March 16, 2017 at 9:00 a.m. A review of the Appeals Bureau's conference call system indicates that the appellant employer did not register to participate in the hearing. The claimant registered, but was not available at the telephone number provided for the scheduled hearing. Because the appellant employer did not register for the hearing, no hearing was held.

ISSUE:

Should the appeal be dismissed based on the appellant's failure to appear and participate?

FINDINGS OF FACT:

The parties were properly notified of the scheduled hearing for this appeal. The appellant employer did not register a name or telephone number to participate in the scheduled hearing. The employer did not follow the instructions in the hearing notice. Because the appellant was not available to participate, no hearing was held. Official notice of the Clear2there hearing screen is taken to establish that the employer appellant did not register for the hearing.

The hearing notice instruction specifically advises parties:

Date: THU MAR 16, 2017
Iowa Time: 9:00 AM

You must register for the hearing immediately!

You must register your phone number and the name(s) and phone number(s) of any witness(es) with the appeal bureau. If you do not register, the judge will not be able to call you or your witnesses for the hearing.

The back page of the hearing notice provides further instruction and warning:

Failure to Participate

If you do not participate in the hearing, the judge may dismiss the appeal or issue a decision without considering your evidence or witnesses.

As a *courtesy* to the appellant the record was left open for a grace period of 20 minutes after the hearing start time to give the appellant a *reasonable* opportunity to participate. Allowing additional time would prejudice the non-appealing party for appearing in a timely manner. Holding the appellant in default for failure to appear and participate during a 15-minute window after the hearing start time is reasonable considering the time allocated for each unemployment hearing. This additional time period was more than reasonable under the circumstances.

The unemployment insurance decision had concluded that the claimant was eligible for unemployment insurance benefits. The decision stated that the employer's protest was submitted after the ten day deadline.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

The Iowa Administrative Procedure Act at Iowa Code § 17A.12(3) provides in pertinent part:

If a party fails to appear or participate in a contested case proceeding after proper service of notice, the presiding officer may, if no adjournment is granted, enter a default decision or proceed with the hearing and make a decision in the absence of the party. ... If a decision is rendered against a party who failed to appear for the hearing and the presiding officer is timely requested by that party to vacate the decision for good cause, the time for initiating a further appeal is stayed pending a determination by the presiding officer to grant or deny the request. If adequate reasons are provided showing good cause for the party's failure to appear, the presiding officer shall vacate the decision and, after proper service of notice, conduct another evidentiary hearing. **If adequate reasons are not provided showing good cause for the party's failure to appear, the presiding officer shall deny the motion to vacate.**

Agency rules at Iowa Admin. Code r. 26.14(7) provide:

If a party has not responded to a notice of telephone hearing by providing the appeals bureau with the names and telephone numbers of the persons who are participating in the hearing **by the scheduled starting time of the hearing** or is not available at the telephone number provided, the presiding officer may proceed with the hearing. If the appealing party fails to provide a telephone number or is unavailable for the hearing, the presiding officer may decide the appealing party is in default and dismiss the appeal as provided in Iowa Code § 17A.12(3). The record may be reopened if the absent party makes a request to reopen the hearing under subrule 26.8(3) and shows good cause for reopening the hearing.

a. If an absent party responds to the hearing notice while the hearing is in progress, the presiding officer shall pause to admit the party, summarize the hearing to that point, administer the oath, and resume the hearing.

b. If a party responds to the notice of hearing after the record has been closed and any party which has participated is no longer on the telephone line, the presiding officer shall not take the evidence of the late party. Instead, the presiding officer shall inquire ex parte as to why the party was late in responding to the notice of hearing. For good cause shown, the presiding officer shall reopen the record and cause further notice of hearing to be issued to all parties of record. **The record shall not be reopened if the presiding officer does not find good cause for the party's late response to the notice of hearing.**

c. **Failure to read or follow the instructions on the notice of hearing shall not constitute good cause for reopening the record.** (Emphasis added.)

The Iowa Supreme Court stated that a default should not be set aside for ordinary negligence or want of ordinary care. Defaults should not be set aside where the movant ignores plain instruction with ample opportunity to comply. See *Houlihan v. Emp't Appeal Bd.*, 545 N.W.2d 863 (Iowa 1996). Here the clear directive is to read the hearing notice and register a telephone number where the party can be reached for the hearing. The second part of that directive is to be available at the number provided at the date and time of the hearing. Further, if the party misses or does not receive the hearing call, the party may call the telephone numbers on the hearing notice to receive further instructions.

Due process requires notice and an opportunity to be heard, both of which were provided to each party. *The rule does not provide exceptions for good intentions and/or a party contacting the Appeals Bureau within a 'reasonable' or certain amount of time after the hearing is scheduled.* It is assumed an appellant intends to participate in the hearing simply by the fact that an appeal is filed, but the appellant's responsibility does not end there. Each party is required to follow the prominent specific written instructions printed on the hearing notice.

The employer filed the appeal and is held solely responsible for going forward with the case in a prompt and deliberate manner. The rule holds an appellant in default if not present *at the start of hearing.* As a courtesy, the appellant was granted an additional 20-minute grace period not required by statute or rule. Here, notwithstanding notice, opportunity and additional time, the appellant failed to pursue its appeal at the appointed date and time without providing a good-cause reason for the delay or failure to do so. Accordingly the appellant is in default and the appeal shall be dismissed. Iowa Code § 17A.12(3) and Iowa Admin. Code r. 26.14(7). The unemployment insurance decision remains in force and effect.

If the appellant does not want to pursue this appeal, it need not take any further action. If the appellant/employer wishes to do so, it must comply with the following deadlines. The appellant may appeal the decision directly to the Employment Appeal Board at the address listed in the caption appeal rights information on the front page of this decision within 15 days after the mailing date of this decision. Or, the appellant employer may make a written request to the administrative law judge that the hearing be reopened within 15 days after the mailing date of this decision. The written request should be mailed to the administrative law judge at the address listed at the end of this decision and must explain the emergency or other good cause that prevented the appellant from participating in the hearing at its scheduled time.

DECISION:

The unemployment insurance decision issued on February 6, 2017, reference 07, allowing benefits remains in effect as the appellant employer is in default. The appeal is dismissed.

Terence Nice
Administrative Law Judge
Unemployment Insurance Appeals Bureau
1000 East Grand Avenue
Des Moines, Iowa 50319-0209
Fax (515)478-3528

Decision Dated and Mailed

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