

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT  
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS BUREAU**

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**JOEL J MIDDLETON**  
Claimant

**GREEN BUICK GMC INC**  
Employer

**APPEAL 20A-UI-00377-JC-T**  
**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE  
DECISION**

**OC: 12/08/19**  
**Claimant: Appellant (6)**

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Iowa Code § 96.5(1) – Voluntary Quitting  
Iowa Code § 96.5(2)a – Discharge for Misconduct  
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 claimant/appellant, Joel Middleton, filed an appeal from the January 9, 2020 (reference 02) unemployment insurance decision that denied benefits. Notice of the hearing was mailed to the claimant's last known address of record for a first telephone hearing to be held on January 31, 2020. The claimant did not respond to the notice of hearing to furnish a phone number to be called for the hearing. The administrative law judge located a phone number within the appeal letter and contacted the claimant. He stated he was going to a divorce hearing and the administrative law judge continued the hearing to 2:00 p.m. on February 13, 2020 so he could attend the other hearing.

After proper notice, a second telephone hearing was scheduled for 2:00 p.m. on February 13, 2020. A review of the Appeals Bureau's conference call system after 2:15 p.m. the same day shows the claimant/appellant was unavailable when called at the number listed on his appeal letter. A voicemail was provided, directing the claimant to call the Appeals Bureau immediately if he wanted to participate in his hearing. A grace period was extended to allow him to respond and the record was closed. No hearing was held.

**ISSUE:**

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

**FINDINGS OF FACT:**

The claimant/appellant was properly notified of the scheduled hearing for this appeal. The claimant/appellant failed to be available when called at the time scheduled for this appeal hearing as required by the hearing notice. The claimant/appellant did not request a postponement of the hearing. No hearing was held.

The hearing notice instruction specifically advised both parties:

Date: THU FEB 13, 2020  
Iowa Time: 2:00 p.m.

**IMPORTANT NOTICE!**

**YOU MUST PROVIDE YOUR PHONE NUMBER TO THE APPEALS BUREAU AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.** If you do not follow these instructions, the judge will not call you for the hearing.

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

**Register/Appeal Hearing Procedure**

**You must register a phone number for each hearing by following the instructions on the front of this notice.**

**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. The Appeals Bureau does not have a phone number for this hearing unless you provide it to us by following the instructions on the other side of this page. If you do not follow those instructions the judge will not call you for the hearing. 871 IAC 26.14(7).

The agency's decision concluded that the claimant was disqualified for unemployment insurance benefits.

**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) provides:

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 in writing 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.
- 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 has opined 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, he or she may call the telephone numbers on the hearing notice. 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.*

The claimant/appellant, Joel J. Middleton, appealed the unemployment insurance decision but failed to be available to participate in the scheduled hearing. The claimant/appellant has therefore defaulted on his appeal pursuant to Iowa Code § 17A.12(3) and Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.14(7), and the decision remains in force and effect.

If the appellant disagrees with this decision, a written request to reopen the record must be made to the administrative law judge within 15 days after the mailing date of this decision. The 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 the scheduled time.

**DECISION:**

The claimant/appellant is in default and the appeal is dismissed. The unemployment insurance decision dated January 9, 2020, (reference 02) denying benefits remains in effect.

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Jennifer L. Beckman  
Administrative Law Judge  
Unemployment Insurance Appeals Bureau  
Iowa Workforce Development  
1000 East Grand Avenue  
Des Moines, Iowa 50319-0209  
Fax 515-478-3528

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Decision Dated and Mailed

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