

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS BUREAU**

JUAN D GARZA

Claimant

WEST LIBERTY FOODS LLC

Employer

APPEAL 20A-UI-02566-AW-T

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

OC: 02/23/20

Claimant: Appellant (6R)

Iowa Code § 96.5(2)a – Discharge for Misconduct
Iowa Code § 96.3(7) – Recovery of Benefit Overpayment
Iowa Code § 17A.12(3) – Default Decision
Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-26.14(7) – Dismissal of Appeal on Default

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

Claimant filed an appeal from the March 16, 2020 (reference 01) unemployment insurance decision that denied benefits. Notices of hearing were mailed to the parties' last known addresses of record for a telephone hearing scheduled for April 24, 2020, at 10:00 a.m. A review of the Appeals Bureau's conference call system indicates that the appellant failed to respond to the hearing notice and provide a telephone number at which appellant could be reached for the scheduled hearing and no hearing was held. Official notice is taken of the administrative record.

ISSUE:

Whether the appeal should be dismissed based on the appellant's failure to appear and participate.
Whether claimant has been overpaid benefits.

FINDINGS OF FACT:

The parties were properly notified of the scheduled hearing for this appeal. The appellant failed to provide a telephone number at which appellant could be reached for the scheduled hearing and did not participate or request a postponement of the hearing as required by the hearing notice. Official notice of the Clear2there hearing control screen is taken to establish that appellant did not call or register online with the Appeals Bureau to provide a telephone number and/or name of a representative.

The hearing notice instruction specifically advises parties of the date and time of hearing. It also states:

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 provides further instruction and warning:

Failure to Participate or Register for Appeal Hearing

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 information quoted above also appears on the hearing notice in Spanish.

As a courtesy to the appellant the record was left open for a minimum of 15 minutes after the hearing start time to give the appellant a reasonable opportunity to participate. 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 unemployment hearings.

The representative's decision concluded that claimant was not eligible for unemployment insurance benefits.

Despite being denied benefits at the initial fact-finding, the decision was made by Iowa Workforce Development to release funds of claimants while their appeals were pending due to the backlog in appeals caused by the recent COVID 19 outbreak. Claimant was one of the individuals whose funds were released pending appeal. The administrative record reflects that claimant filed for and has received regular unemployment insurance (UI) benefits in the gross amount of \$3,270.00 for the six-week period between March 8, 2020 and April 18, 2020.

Claimant may have also received federal unemployment insurance benefits through Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC). There have been no initial investigation and decision regarding whether claimant has been overpaid FPUC. The issue of whether claimant has been overpaid FPUC should be remanded to the Benefits Bureau for an initial investigation and decision.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

The Iowa Administrative Procedure Act at Iowa Code § 17A.12(3) provides that if a party fails to appear or participate in a hearing after proper service of notice, the judge may enter a default decision or proceed with the hearing and make a decision in the absence of the party. The statute further states that if a party makes a timely request to vacate the decision and shows good cause for failing to appear, the judge shall vacate the decision and conduct another hearing.

Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-26.14(7) provides, in pertinent part:

(7) 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 section 17A.12(3).

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.

If the appellant disagrees with this decision, the appellant may appeal the decision directly to the Employment Appeal Board, whose address is listed at the top right caption.

As claimant was receiving benefits pending appeal, the next issue to be determined is whether claimant has been overpaid UI benefits. For the reasons that follow, the administrative law judge concludes claimant was overpaid UI benefits which must be repaid.

Iowa Code section 96.3.(7) states:

7. Recovery of overpayment of benefits.

a. If an individual receives benefits for which the individual is subsequently determined to be ineligible, even though the individual acts in good faith and is not otherwise at fault, the benefits shall be recovered. The department in its discretion may recover the overpayment of benefits either by having a sum equal to the overpayment deducted from any future benefits payable to the individual or by having the individual pay to the department a sum equal to the overpayment.

Since the disqualifying decision has been affirmed, benefits were paid to which claimant was not entitled. The administrative law judge concludes that claimant has been overpaid UI in the gross amount of \$3,270.00 for the six-week period between March 8, 2020 and April 18, 2020. Those benefits must be recovered in accordance with Iowa law.

The issue of whether claimant has been overpaid FPUC is remanded to the Benefits Bureau for an initial investigation and decision

Note to Claimant: This decision determines you are not eligible for regular unemployment insurance benefits. If you disagree with this decision you may file an appeal to the Employment Appeal Board by following the instructions on the first page of this decision. Individuals who do not qualify for regular unemployment insurance benefits due to disqualifying separations, but who are currently unemployed for reasons related to COVID-19 may qualify for Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA). **You will need to apply for PUA to determine your eligibility under the program.** Additional information on how to apply for PUA can be found at <https://www.iowaworkforcedevelopment.gov/pua-information>.

DECISION:

The March 16, 2020 (reference 01) unemployment insurance decision denying benefits remains in effect as the appellant is in default and the appeal is dismissed. Claimant has been overpaid regular unemployment insurance benefits in the gross amount of \$3,270.00 for the six-week period between March 8, 2020 and April 18, 2020, which must be repaid.

REMAND:

The issue of whether claimant has been overpaid Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation is remanded to the Benefits Bureau of Iowa Workforce Development for an initial investigation and decision.



Adrienne C. Williamson
Administrative Law Judge
Unemployment Insurance Appeals Bureau
Iowa Workforce Development
1000 East Grand Avenue
Des Moines, Iowa 50319-0209
Fax (515)478-3528

April 24, 2020
Decision Dated and Mailed

acw/scn