

SUPREME COURT OF IDAHO

Hughen v. Highland Estates, 137 Idaho 349

48 P.3d 1238 (2002) · No. No. 27442 · Decided June 5, 2002

SUMMARY

The Supreme Court of Idaho reviewed the denial of unemployment benefits to Jerry Hughen after determining that he voluntarily quit his employment with Highland Estates without good cause. The court held that substantial and competent evidence supported the Industrial Commission's findings and rejected Hughen's due process claim based on the absence of appointed counsel. The court affirmed the denial of benefits and awarded costs to Highland Estates, but declined to award attorney's fees.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	Supreme Court of Idaho
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Trout, Chief Justice; Schroeder, Justice; Walters, Justice; Kidwell, Justice; Eismann, Justice
JURISDICTION	Idaho
DECIDED	June 5, 2002
DOCKET	No. 27442
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Hughen appealed the Industrial Commission's decision upholding the denial of his unemployment compensation benefits after finding that he voluntarily quit without good cause.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The court freely reviews questions of law and reviews factual findings only to determine whether they are supported by substantial and competent evidence. The Commission's credibility and evidentiary-weight determinations are not disturbed unless clearly erroneous, and the appellate court does not reweigh the evidence.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Published opinion; precedential authority of the Supreme Court of Idaho.
PARTIES	Jerry Hughen v. Highland Estates, State of Idaho, Department of Labor

TOPICS

unemployment benefits

judicial review of agency action

due process

standard of review

appellate procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

employment law

administrative law

unemployment benefits

appellate procedure

constitutional law

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the failure to appoint counsel or provide Hughen with additional assistance during the unemployment-benefits proceedings violated due process.
2. Whether substantial and competent evidence supported the Industrial Commission's finding that Hughen voluntarily quit without good cause rather than being terminated.
3. Whether Highland Estates was entitled to attorney's fees on appeal under Idaho Code section 12-121 and Idaho Rule of Civil Procedure 54.

HOLDINGS

1. The State's failure to appoint counsel for Hughen in the unemployment-benefits proceeding did not violate due process because civil claimants whose personal liberty is not threatened are presumptively not entitled to appointed counsel, and Hughen presented no evidence overcoming that presumption.
2. Substantial and competent evidence supported the Industrial Commission's determination that Hughen voluntarily quit without good cause and therefore was ineligible for unemployment benefits.
3. Highland Estates was not entitled to attorney's fees on appeal because Hughen's appeal was not frivolous, unreasonable, or without foundation.

KEY QUOTATIONS

"Substantial and competent evidence is "relevant evidence which a reasonable mind might accept to support a conclusion."" (1240)

"On appeal, this Court does not re-weigh the evidence or consider whether it would have reached a different conclusion from the evidence presented." (1240)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Jerry Hughen worked for Highland Estates and injured his back twice in October 2000. Highland offered him temporarily restricted work on a modified schedule at a reduced wage, which he accepted, but Hughen left work after completing what he believed was the permissible assignment and did not return the following day. Highland later listed his position, hired a replacement, and told Hughen not to return. The Commission found that Hughen had voluntarily quit without good cause, in part because he had previously indicated an intention to quit and failed to return when scheduled.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Hughen's unemployment claim was initially approved by the Idaho Department of Labor on December 14, 2000. Highland Estates appealed, and an appeals examiner reversed the approval after finding that Hughen voluntarily quit by failing to return to work during a modified work schedule. The Industrial Commission adopted the examiner's findings with modifications and affirmed. The Idaho Supreme Court affirmed the Commission's decision.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

CASES CITED

- Ogden v. Thompson, 128 Idaho 87, 88, 910 P.2d 759, 760 (1996)
- Boise Orthopedic Clinic v. Idaho State Ins. Fund, 128 Idaho 161, 164, 911 P.2d 754, 757 (1996)
- Zapata v. J.R. Simplot Co., 132 Idaho 513, 515, 975 P.2d 1178, 1180 (1999)
- Warden v. Idaho Timber Corp., 132 Idaho 454, 457, 974 P.2d 506, 509 (1999)
- State v. One 1990 Geo Metro, VIN 2C1MR246L6012694, 126 Idaho 675, 683, 889 P.2d 109, 117 (Idaho Ct. App. 1995)
- Lassiter v. Department of Social Services, 452 U.S. 18, 26-27, 101 S. Ct. 2153, 2159-60, 68 L. Ed. 2d 640, 649 (1981)
- Doran v. Employment Security Agency, 75 Idaho 94, 96, 267 P.2d 628, 630 (1954)
- Appel v. LePage, 135 Idaho 133, 15 P.3d 1141, 1147 (2000)