

SUPREME COURT OF IDAHO

Sparks v. Laura Drake Insurance and Financial Services, Inc.

Sparks v. Laura Drake Ins. & Fin. Servs., Inc., 426 P.3d 489 (Idaho 2018) · No. 45420 · Decided September 10, 2018

SUMMARY

Carla Sparks appealed an Idaho Industrial Commission decision denying her unemployment benefits after Laura Drake Insurance and Financial Services, Inc. discharged her for cause. The Idaho Supreme Court held that the Commission did not abuse its discretion by refusing to reopen the evidentiary proceedings and that substantial and competent evidence supported the finding of misconduct. The court affirmed the Commission's decision and awarded appellate costs to the Idaho Department of Labor.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	Supreme Court of Idaho
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Bevan, J.; Burdick, C.J.; Horton, J.; Brody, J.; Stegner, J.
JURISDICTION	Idaho
DECIDED	September 10, 2018
DOCKET	45420
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Sparks appealed the Idaho Industrial Commission's decision affirming the denial of unemployment benefits to the Idaho Supreme Court.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The Idaho Supreme Court reviews the Commission's admission of additional evidence for abuse of discretion. It reviews legal conclusions freely, but will not disturb factual findings supported by substantial and competent evidence and does not reweigh evidence or disturb credibility determinations unless clearly erroneous.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	published
PARTIES	Carla Sparks v. Idaho Department of Labor

TOPICS

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PRACTICE AREAS

employment law

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QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the Idaho Industrial Commission abused its discretion by denying Sparks's request to reopen the evidentiary proceedings.
2. Whether substantial and competent evidence supported the Commission's determination that Sparks was discharged for misconduct and therefore was ineligible for unemployment benefits.

HOLDINGS

1. The Commission did not abuse its discretion in denying Sparks's request to present additional evidence because it properly treated reopening as discretionary, acted within the authority granted by Rule 7(C), considered the interests of justice, and reasonably determined that Sparks's negligence in failing to retrieve properly served notice was insufficient.
2. The Commission's finding that Sparks was discharged for misconduct and was therefore ineligible for unemployment benefits was supported by substantial and competent evidence.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“appellate court review is limited to the evidence, theories and arguments that were presented below.” (at 3)

“It is axiomatic that an appellate court will not consider new evidence that was never before the trial court. We are limited to review of the record made below” (at 3)

“Substantial and competent evidence is relevant evidence that a reasonable mind might accept to support a conclusion.” (at 5)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Sparks was discharged by Laura Drake Insurance and Financial Services after her employer concluded that her work performance was not timely or conscientious despite a verbal warning and weekly performance meetings. Sparks did not appear at the telephonic unemployment-benefits hearing, leaving the employer's testimony about the termination undisputed. The Commission found that the notice of hearing had been properly served and that Sparks's failure to retrieve the notice did not justify reopening the proceedings.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

The Idaho Department of Labor initially determined that Sparks was eligible for unemployment benefits. After Laura Drake Insurance and Financial Services, Inc. appealed, an appeals examiner conducted a telephonic hearing that Sparks did not attend and found that she had been discharged for cause. The appeals examiner and the Industrial Commission denied Sparks's requests to reopen the evidentiary proceedings and affirmed the finding that she was ineligible for benefits. The Idaho Supreme Court affirmed.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

CASES CITED

- Simpson v. Trinity Mission Health & Rehab of Midland L.P., 150 Idaho 154, 156, 244 P.3d 1240, 1242 (2010)
- Lunneborg v. My Fun Life, 163 Idaho 856, 863, 421 P.3d 187, 194 (2018)
- Serrano v. Four Seasons Framing, 157 Idaho 309, 314, 336 P.3d 242, 247 (2014)
- Knowlton v. Wood River Medical Center, 151 Idaho 135, 140, 254 P.3d 36, 41 (2011)
- State v. Johnson, 148 Idaho 664, 670, 227 P.3d 918, 924 (2010)
- State v. Mitchell, 124 Idaho 374, 376 n.1, 859 P.2d 972, 974 n.1 (Ct. App. 1993)
- Viveros v. State Department of Health and Welfare, 126 Idaho 714, 716, 889 P.2d 1104 (1995)
- Slaven v. Road to Recovery, 143 Idaho 483, 484, 148 P.3d 1229, 1230 (2006)
- Uhl v. Ballard Medical Products, Inc., 138 Idaho 653, 657, 67 P.3d 1265, 1269 (2003)
- Adams v. Aspen Water, Inc., 150 Idaho 408, 413, 247 P.3d 635, 640 (2011)
- Folks v. Moscow School District No. 281, 129 Idaho 833, 838, 933 P.2d 642, 647 (1997)
- Talbot v. Desert View Care Center, 156 Idaho 517, 521, 328 P.3d 497, 501 (2014)