

BRB No. 11-0740 BLA

MAXINE M. LOWE)
(Widow of BILLY S. LOWE))
)
Claimant-Respondent)
)
v.)
)
C&R COAL COMPANY, INCORPORATED) DATE ISSUED: 08/07/2012
)
and)
)
WEST VIRGINIA COAL WORKERS')
PNEUMOCONIOSIS FUND)
)
Employer/Carrier-)
Petitioners)
)
DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF WORKERS')
COMPENSATION PROGRAMS, UNITED)
STATES DEPARTMENT OF LABOR)
)
Party-in-Interest) DECISION and ORDER

Appeal of the Order Awarding Survivor's Benefits of William S. Colwell,
Administrative Law Judge, United States Department of Labor.

Joseph E. Wolfe (Wolfe Williams Rutherford & Reynolds), Norton,
Virginia, for claimant.

Ashley M. Harman, Kevin T. Gillen (Jackson Kelly PLLC), Morgantown,
West Virginia, for employer/carrier.

Rita Roppolo (M. Patricia Smith, Solicitor of Labor; Rae Ellen James,
Associate Solicitor; Michael J. Rutledge, Counsel for Administrative
Litigation and Legal Advice), Washington, D.C., for the Director, Office of
Workers' Compensation Programs, United States Department of Labor.

Before: DOLDER, Chief Administrative Appeals Judge, SMITH and
HALL, Administrative Appeals Judges.

PER CURIAM:

Employer/carrier (employer) appeals the Order Awarding Survivor's Benefits (2011-BLA-05519) of Associate Chief Administrative Law Judge William S. Colwell (the administrative law judge) rendered on a survivor's claim filed pursuant to the provisions of the Black Lung Benefits Act, 30 U.S.C. §§901-944 (2006), *amended by* Pub. L. No. 111-148, §1556, 124 Stat. 119 (2010) (to be codified at 30 U.S.C. §§921(c)(4) and 932(l)) (the Act).

On March 23, 2010, amendments to the Act, affecting claims filed after January 1, 2005, that were pending on or after March 23, 2010, were enacted. *See* Section 1556 of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA), Public Law No. 111-148 (2010). The amendments, in pertinent part, revive Section 422(l) of the Act, 30 U.S.C. §932(l), which provides that the survivor of a miner who was eligible to receive benefits at the time of his or her death is automatically entitled to survivor's benefits, without having to establish that the miner's death was due to pneumoconiosis. 30 U.S.C. §932(l).

On May 10, 2011, the Director, Office of Workers' Compensation Programs (the Director), submitted a Motion for Summary Decision and argued that, under amended Section 932(l), and given the filing date of her claim, claimant was entitled to benefits based on the award of benefits to her deceased husband.¹ Claimant did not respond to the motion. Employer opposed the motion, challenging the constitutionality of amended Section 932(l) and its applicability to the instant claim, to which the Director replied in support of his position.

The administrative law judge found that claimant is an eligible survivor of the miner, and that claimant meets the eligibility criteria for automatic entitlement to benefits pursuant to amended Section 932(l). Accordingly, the administrative law judge awarded survivor's benefits, commencing as of August 1, 2010.

On appeal, employer asserts that the retroactive application of the automatic entitlement provisions of amended Section 932(l) to claims filed after January 1, 2005 constitutes a violation of its due process rights and an unconstitutional taking of private property. Employer also maintains that the operative date for determining eligibility pursuant to amended Section 932(l) is the date that the miner's claim was filed, not the date that the survivor's claim was filed. Both claimant and the Director respond, urging

¹ Claimant is the widow of the miner, Billy S. Lowe, who was receiving federal black lung benefits pursuant to a final award at the time of his death on August 7, 2010. Director's Exhibits 2, 3, 5. Claimant filed her claim for survivor's benefits on September 8, 2010. Director's Exhibit 3.

affirmance of the award of benefits. In reply, employer reiterates its arguments, and requests that the case be held in abeyance pending final resolution of the constitutional challenges to amended Section 932(l) and/or a ruling as to the operative date for determining eligibility thereunder by the United States Supreme Court.²

The Board's scope of review is defined by statute. The administrative law judge's Decision and Order must be affirmed if it is supported by substantial evidence, is rational, and is in accordance with applicable law.³ 33 U.S.C. §921(b)(3), as incorporated by 30 U.S.C. §932(a); *O'Keefe v. Smith, Hinchman & Grylls Associates, Inc.*, 380 U.S. 359 (1965).

We reject employer's contention that retroactive application of the automatic entitlement provisions of amended Section 932(l) to claims filed after January 1, 2005, constitutes a due process violation and a taking of private property, for the same reasons the Board rejected substantially similar arguments in *Mathews v. United Pocahontas Coal Co.*, 24 BLR 1-193, 1-200 (2010), *recon. denied*, BRB No. 09-0666 BLA (Apr. 14, 2011)(Order)(unpub.), *appeal docketed*, No. 11-1620 (4th Cir. June 13, 2011); *see also Keene v. Consolidation Coal Co.*, 645 F.3d 844, 24 BLR 2-385 (7th Cir. 2011); *B&G Constr. Co. v. Director, OWCP [Campbell]*, 662 F3d 233, 25 BLR 2-13 (3d Cir. 2011). Further, as the United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit has affirmed the Board's holding in *Stacy v. Olga Coal Co.*, 24 BLR 1-207 (2010), that the operative date for determining eligibility for survivor's benefits under amended Section 932(l) is the date that the survivor's claim was filed, not the date that the miner's claim was filed, we reject employer's argument to the contrary, and we decline to hold this case in abeyance pending employer's appeal of the decision to the United States Supreme Court. *See West Virginia CWP Fund v. Stacy*, 671 F. 3d 378 (4th Cir. 2011), *pet. for cert. pending*, No. 11-1342; *Mathews*, 24 BLR at 1-201.

Because claimant filed her survivor's claim after January 1, 2005, her claim was pending on or after March 23, 2010, and the miner was receiving benefits under a final award at the time of his death, we affirm the administrative law judge's finding that claimant is entitled to receive survivor's benefits pursuant to amended Section 422(l) of the Act, 30 U.S.C. §932(l).

² Employer's argument, that further proceedings or actions related to this claim should be held in abeyance pending resolution of the constitutional challenges to the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, is moot. *See Nat'l Fed'n of Indep. Bus. v. Sebelius*, 567 U.S. , 2012 WL 2427810 (June 28, 2012).

³ Because the miner's coal mine employment was in Virginia, this case arises within the jurisdiction of the United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit. *See Shupe v. Director, OWCP*, 12 BLR 1-200 (1989)(en banc); Director's Exhibit 2.

Accordingly, the administrative law judge's Order Awarding Survivor's Benefits is affirmed.

SO ORDERED.

NANCY S. DOLDER, Chief
Administrative Appeals Judge

ROY P. SMITH
Administrative Appeals Judge

BETTY JEAN HALL
Administrative Appeals Judge