SUMMARY STATEMENT

Conger v. Clark
Docket No. 52800

This case involves a dispute over the enforceability of a lease agreement containing an option to purchase real property. Jeff Conger leased property from Jay Clark and paid $8,000 for an option to purchase under the agreement. The option entitled Conger to become the owner upon full satisfaction of a mortgage loan in Clark's name. Conger alleges that he made payments in accordance with the lease-option agreement and, in December 2022, notified Clark that he was prepared to pay the remaining mortgage balance to exercise the option. When Clark refused to honor the option, Conger filed a complaint seeking specific performance, a declaratory judgment establishing his rights under the agreement, and other related relief. Clark responded by asserting several affirmative defenses, including estoppel, and filed a counterclaim for breach of contract. On Clark's motion for summary judgment, the district court concluded that Conger was judicially estopped from asserting any rights under the lease-purchase agreement because he failed to disclose the contract in a prior bankruptcy proceeding. The court further determined that the undisclosed asset remained property of the bankruptcy estate, and that Conger therefore lacked standing to assert any legal interest in exercising the option.

On appeal, Conger challenges the district court's application of judicial estoppel, arguing that the court erred in determining that he (1) took a clearly inconsistent position in the bankruptcy proceeding to obtain an unfair advantage and (2) obtained an unfair advantage or benefit from the omissions. Conger further contends that the district court's application of judicial estoppel contradicts Idaho's policy favoring merits-based adjudication.

The Idaho Supreme Court affirmed the judgment of the district court. The Court held that Conger did not have standing to litigate the loss of the lease-option because he failed to disclose it in his bankruptcy filings. Accordingly, it remained the property of the bankruptcy estate under the control of the trustee. Having concluded that Conger did not have standing, the Court did not reach his judicial estoppel arguments.

******This summary constitutes no part of the Court's opinion. It has been prepared by court staff for the convenience of the public.******