

SUMMARY STATEMENT
State of Idaho v. Deven Lequint Sauve
Docket No. 51324

In this case arising out of Ada County, the Court of Appeals vacated Deven Lequint Sauve’s judgment of conviction for unlawful possession of a firearm and possession of a controlled substance with the intent to deliver. In the early morning hours, an officer was parked outside a hotel known for drug activity and observed Sauve drive into the lot, approach a hotel door, and return to his vehicle. After Sauve failed to signal or stop upon exiting the lot, the officer initiated a traffic stop. Sauve pulled into the lot of a closed business, exited the vehicle, fled on foot, and was later apprehended by a different officer. Because the vehicle was parked in the lot of a closed business, officers decided to tow it and, during an inventory search, discovered controlled substances, drug paraphernalia, firearms, and firearm accessories. Sauve filed a motion to suppress, arguing the decision to impound his vehicle was not reasonable. Without the benefit of subsequent Idaho Supreme Court caselaw, the district court disagreed and concluded that the officers’ decision to impound the vehicle was reasonable. According to the district court, although the vehicle did not pose a hazard and was parked in a lot, there was no evidence to support a finding that the inventory search and/or decision to tow was made as a pretext for a criminal investigation.

On appeal, Sauve argued the district court “impermissibly flipped the burden of proof” by finding that the lack of evidence about the officers’ primary purpose of impounding his vehicle weighed against him rather than the State. The Court agreed and held that the district court erred in finding the officers’ decision to impound Sauve’s vehicle was reasonable. The Court held that whether impoundment of a vehicle is lawful, or reasonable under the circumstances, depends on if it constitutes “community caretaking” by law enforcement. Because the State did not present evidence that Sauve’s vehicle either obstructed traffic or threatened public safety, the Court concluded that the State failed to meet its burden of showing that the officers’ decision to impound Sauve’s vehicle served a community caretaking purpose. As a result, the Court held that the impoundment of Sauve’s vehicle was not reasonable, making the ensuing inventory search a violation of Sauve’s Fourth Amendment rights. Consequently, the Court vacated Sauve’s judgment of conviction.

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