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## Sheriff asked to frisk school board member for gun

By [Steve Welker](#) | The News Herald

Burke County's sheriff and one of his lieutenants frisked a school board member and searched his vehicle for concealed weapons midway through Monday's board of education meeting at Patton High School. They found no weapon.

The school board member, Buddy Armour, who holds a concealed-carry permit issued by the sheriff's office, emphatically said he would never bring a gun onto school grounds.

"My gosh," he said, "those of us who have been through concealed carry school know better."

"Do I want to go to prison that badly?" he added half-jokingly.

Armour, describing the incident the following day, seemed to take it casually, but Sheriff John McDevitt said seriously, "We're going to check out any complaint we get like that."

The complaint came from school board member David Barnard, who said he didn't have any first-hand knowledge that led him to suspect Armour had a weapon.

"There has been long suspicion" among board members that Armour carried a personal firearm, Barnard said. "It had been dragging on for three or four months. It was just such a volatile situation last night."

In truth, hundreds of people crowded the special called meeting where the school board reviewed School Superintendent David Burleson's contract. They jammed the school's media center and some loudly booed school board members when the meeting got under way. Later, after the crowd moved into the more-spacious auditorium, some audience members screamed at the board and hurled insults.

"Passions are running high on this. Yes, they are," Armour said.

The sheriff actually frisked Armour twice during the evening.

McDevitt said, "Buddy has a concealed-carry permit. He's had it for years. He shoots a lot. He has not and is not going to carry a gun on school property.... We'd already talked about it in the past."

Because of that past relationship, both Armour and McDevitt took it lightly when Armour approached the media center before the meeting started and invited the sheriff to search him.

Patton's media center has RF detectors at the doors and chest-high devices that pick up signals from chips embedded in books and other material that signal if they haven't been neutralized at the checkout desk.

Seeing the detector, which looks somewhat like metal detectors at security stations, Armour spread out his arms.

McDevitt patted him down.

"We were just laughing and joking about it," Armour said.

Soon after opening the meeting, the board went into a closed session to hear the advice of its attorney.

About 20 minutes later, according to McDevitt, the session in the school office ended.

McDevitt; Lt. John Hoyle, who coordinates the sheriff's school resource officers; and 15 to 20 other people, including some Morganton Public Safety officers, were standing in front of the office.

Barnard came out and went directly to McDevitt. The sheriff said he seemed agitated.

"Barnard said, 'Sheriff, you need to check Buddy Armour. I think he's got a gun,'" according to McDevitt. Armour soon followed.

"I went back out there and John (McDevitt) and John Hoyle came up to me and John Hoyle had this real not-so-good look on his face and John (McDevitt) said, 'I have to check you and your car,'" Armour said.

"I handed my keys to them and I said, 'You know what I'm driving...,' and they searched it.

"They were very embarrassed about it."

Barnard insists he has no personal vendetta against Armour, but said he had a genuine concern.

"Buddy has been seen in the central office showing Randall Brackett a weapon in the past," he said.

"(School board member) Karen Sain heard he'd brought a weapon to all the meetings."

Armour said flatly, "That's not true." He told another reporter, "I will never carry a firearm onto school grounds, period!"

As a long-time gun enthusiast, target shooter and collector, Armour said he understands some people have a natural fear of weapons.

Another board member's insistence that he be searched "ticked off a lot of people," Armour said, "but I figured it was just part of the paranoia."

McDevitt, too, acknowledged the past history of tension between board members and what Barnard described as the "volatility" of the situation Monday night.

"I went because I knew there was going to be a huge crowd there," said McDevitt, who noted that Morganton Chief Mark Tolbert sent several uniformed police officers to the meeting as a precautionary measure.

The meeting ended without any decision on Burlison's contract. The board recessed for up to two weeks to consider the information it received Monday.

The board's next regular scheduled meeting will be on April 20.