

WV Archives Director, Fred Armstrong Fired

News

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Longtime state archives & history director dismissed without warning.

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Fred Armstrong, the longtime state Archives and History director, was fired Thursday.

Armstrong said he was given his letter of termination at a 9 a.m. meeting with Culture and History Commissioner Randall Reid-Smith.

The letter did not give a reason for his firing, except to note that as a will and pleasure employee, he can be terminated at any time without cause.

"I was found to no longer be needed," Armstrong said.

Armstrong said he has almost 30 years of service to the state, and has been director of Archives and History since 1985.

He said he has no idea why he was fired, but said he suspects it has something to do with administration proposals to convert the archives library in the Cultural Center into a cafe/gift shop.

Armstrong said he's never taken a position publicly for or against the proposed cafe.

"I've never discussed that with the media," he said. "If that's the impetus for my dismissal, there's nothing I've ever said."

Armstrong said the issue was the source of contention at last week's Archives and History Commission meeting.

"There was exasperation by the commission members about the inability to get any information," he said of proposed cafe, whose plans have never officially been presented to either the commission or the Capitol Building Commission.

"The Commission for the last five or six meetings has been trying to get information," he said, adding, "Whatever's being done is being done behind closed doors."

Armstrong said he believes Reid-Smith had been planning to fire him for some time, and noted that the commissioner had scheduled Thursday's meeting about 10 days ago.

Reid-Smith was out-of-town Thursday afternoon, and Culture and History spokeswoman Jacqueline Proctor could not be reached for comment.

Lara Ramsburg, spokeswoman for Gov. Joe Manchin, said she could not comment, because official policy prohibits discussing personnel matters.

Armstrong said Reid-Smith's letter concluded by ordering him to "vacate the building immediately," and said he was offended to be escorted out of the building by a security officer.

"For all these years, I could be trusted with all the state's valuable records ... but when it comes time to leave, they have to have a security guard escort me," Armstrong commented.

Armstrong actually did not leave the Cultural Center immediately, but went to the archives library to finish proofreading the next issue of the division's newsletter. He said he told the security guard that he did not have authority to keep him out of the library, which is open to the public.

"I told him I will use the library, and may well hold court in it in the future," Armstrong said.

After spending a career building up the state archives, Armstrong said he is bitter about the way he was forced out.

"If I were an embarrassment to the administration, I would expect to get this kind of treatment," he said.

Bob Conte, chairman of the Archives and History Commission, said he was shocked to learn of Armstrong's firing Thursday.

"This is as out of the blue to me as it is to everyone else," he said.

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