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North Dakota cops will be first in nation to use weaponized drones

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North Dakota's [Bill 1328](#) was supposed to be cut and dry. "In my opinion there should be a nice, red line: drones should not be weaponized. Period," Rep. Rick Becker (R-Bismarck), the bill's original sponsor, told a committee hearing back in March, per [The Daily Beast](#). That was going to happen too, at least until an industry lobbying firm got involved. Now, law enforcement agencies in North Dakota are legally allowed to [arm their UAVs](#) with any manner of weapons, so long as they aren't "[lethal](#)".

The bill was, in fact, originally designed to strictly limit law enforcement's ability to weaponize drones. It also demanded that police obtain a search warrant from a judge before employing drones in an investigation. However, a rep from the North Dakota Peace Officer's Association then amended the bill -- at the behest of the state house committee, no less -- to limit only "[lethal weapons](#)." Anything classified as "less than lethal" is now allowed.

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That means cops can outfit their UAVs with everything from rubber bullets, pepper spray and Tasers to tear gas and sound cannons. And, as [The Guardian](#) points out, "less than lethal" police Tasers have already killed 39 Americans this year alone.

'When you're not on the ground, and you're making decisions, you're sort of separate," bemoaned Becker back in March. "Depersonalized." Given that law enforcement officials have already [killed some 774 Americans](#) this year, a future [Good Kill](#)-like scenario featuring your neighborhood police feels all too real.



Atlanta police officers with an unarmed UAV during last year's Ferguson protests - Image Credit: Associated Press

Not so, Grand Forks County Sheriff Bob Rost told *The Daily Beast*. "It was a bad bill to start with," Rost said. "We just thought the whole thing was ridiculous." He also took umbrage with the fact that he'd need a [search warrant](#) to use his county's drone when searching for evidence, clearly misunderstanding the [core concept](#) behind [how search warrants work](#).

And it wasn't just law enforcement that had a hand in castrating this bill. North Dakota's Department of Commerce, the director of the University of North Dakota's drone major program and various economic groups that would benefit from lax regulation testified against it. The reason for this, according Keith Lund of the Grand Forks Regional Economic Development Corporation, is simple.

"It's really all about the commercial development, which is where all of this is heading," Lund said during the hearing in March. "If [a law] is somehow limiting commercial, law enforcement development... that is a negative in terms of companies looking and investing in opportunities in the state of North Dakota." Because who needs civil liberties

when there's money to be made by the UAV industry?

[Image Credit: AFP/Getty Images]

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