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Campus police to carry stun guns

■ **Regents OK proposal allowing Tasers, 9-0.**

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IOWA CITY

The state Board of Regents' decision Wednesday to allow campus police to carry Tasers

was hardly a stunner.

After the university presidents of Northern Iowa, Iowa and Iowa State put their support behind the proposal to arm security officers with the M-26 Taser stun guns, the board was expected to concur, and it did so with a 9-0 vote.

That was a relief to Dave Zarifis, UNI's director of public safety, who exchanged congrat-

ulations with his University of Iowa and Iowa State counterparts after the board meeting in Iowa's Memorial Union.

Zarifis had campaigned across campus for the Tasers, giving informational presentations to university groups over the past few months. In November, the Northern Iowa Student Government approved a resolution in support of the

stun guns on a 29-5 vote. Later that month, a straw poll of 13 members of the UNI Faculty Senate showed eight opposed the Tasers, with one in favor and four abstentions.

"We realize we won't have full support from everybody," Zarifis said. "But university atmospheres have changed

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An M-26 Taser

TASERS

Officers will be trained before they use Tasers

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over time. It's more of an open environment and we need these tools to make certain we're doing all we can for public safety."

In addition to the student support, UNI President Robert Koob said he received notice of support from two other major staff groups.

"My opposition in the past has been to lethal weapons," Koob said. "I looked at the literature and found no pattern of ill side effects. My view of it is that it's like a long-range nightstick. In the end, I couldn't find a rationale to deny this."

University of Iowa President Mary Sue Coleman agreed.

"I asked, two-and-a-half years ago, our head of public safety to investigate alternatives to lethal

firearms," Coleman said. "I'm extremely pleased with the recommendation he brought to me."

The M-26 Taser, which resembles a handgun, shoots a cube-shaped cartridge with two small probes that deliver an electrical shock, disabling the targeted person from a few seconds to a few minutes

"We work in a dangerous profession," Zarifis said. "This will allow for better officer safety, as well as the safety of others."

When the stun guns will be added to the UNI safety officers' arsenal of pepper spray and collapsible batons is not clear.

"It absolutely will not start until we're ready," Zarifis said. "The timing will be based on when we get the equipment, the training, the policies and the readiness. It's not going to be pushed."

There are 18 officers on the UNI safety force. Each Taser costs around \$400. Zarifis has maintained that if people expect protection from the safety force, the officers need the Tasers.