

Bill to regulate Uber fails in Nevada Senate

By Associated Press

CARSON CITY – A bill that would regulate ride-hailing companies such as Uber in Nevada failed in the state Senate on Wednesday after Democrats opposed the measure. But there are still ways the concept could re-emerge later in the legislative session.

Ten Democrats voted against SB439, which would create regulations for companies that allow people to hail a ride using a smartphone and often involve part-time drivers using their personal vehicles. Republican proponents needed more votes from the Democratic faction to pass the measure because it would raise a fee and therefore needed a two-thirds majority.

The vote came after bickering between senators and several speeches.

“No one, in my opinion, should have the authority to preserve the status quo and stifle technology,” said Republican Sen. James Settelmeyer, who held up a candle and then a light bulb to illustrate his points about progress.

Democrats said they opposed the bill because they wanted amendments to improve consumer protections, including one requiring FBI background checks on drivers and another that would have the state Public Utilities Commission regulate so-called surge pricing, when fares rise because of heavy demand.

“Our biggest industry is tourism,” said Democratic Senate Minority Leader Aaron Ford. “Allow one bad headline to come out about the way the background checks were done in this instance, and we’ll have repercussions that will reverberate

throughout the state.”

Uber briefly operated in Nevada this fall before a state judge issued a restraining order, saying the company refused to follow regulations governing taxicab companies.

The bill sets requirements unique to companies like Uber, and it adds a 25-cent-per-trip surcharge to each ride. The funds would benefit road construction projects.

Cab companies have strongly opposed the bill, hiring two former Nevada governors to lobby on their behalf and arguing that Uber is wrongly seeking special treatment instead of conforming to the heavy regulation of the taxi industry.

Republican Sen. Mark Lipparelli said he doesn't think the bill is dead, and he said the evolution of technology is inevitable.

“We don't have Blockbuster anymore,” he said, “but we do have HBO Go.”

The rejection of the bill came hours after senators approved SB440, a companion bill that set insurance requirements for companies like Uber.