Opinion
News



The St. Louis skyline (Wikimedia Commons/Bohao Zhao)



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Amazon is looking for a second home. I propose my town, St. Louis. I'm not the first to suggest this. Our mayor, Lyda Krewson, has submitted a proposal. And New York Times columnist Ross Douthat also proposed it. In fact, Douthat wrote: "What if Amazon treated their headquartering decision as an act of corporate citizenship, part public relations stunt and part genuinely patriotic gesture?"

It is a novel idea, that a company would invest $5 billion in a city that's poor and torn by racial strife. Well, in fact, most U.S. cities these days are poor and torn by racial strife. St. Louis is just a little ahead of the game in the clarity of black citizens that change won't come without noise.

What does St. Louis have? Abandoned land on the north side, near the air and river ports. Infrastructure: mass transit, electric grid, roads and highways. Great universities and good community colleges. A superior baseball team. Excellent water. St. Louis won the last national mayoral taste test.

St. Louis has a workforce ready to go. Like most communities, our black unemployment rate is high. African-Americans are on the bottom, last hired and first fired, not because they don't work, but because they are black.

It would not be a risk for Amazon to come to St. Louis. It's like the joke: Where does an elephant sleep? Anywhere it wants. Amazon could set up shop anywhere and continue its successful model.

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Amazon does not need half a billion in incentives — tax abatements and salary subsidies and environmental waivers like those Wisconsin is giving to Foxconn. Foxconn doesn't need it either. But companies, like elephants, take what they want.

Douthat's point is that companies could act for the benefit of all. Just think about it.