

If Amazon Expands to New York City and Northern Virginia, That's Bad News

By Jim Geraghty November 6, 2018

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Separate from all the elections news, yesterday the Wall Street Journal reported that Amazon is likely to split its new “HQ2” campus among two cities, with Dallas, New York City and Crystal City in Northern Virginia making the final list.

This is bad for all sorts of reasons.

It's bad because it suggests that despite the periodic talk that other parts of the country are enjoying a renaissance, one of the country's biggest businesses prefers to locate more resources in the country's political capital and the financial capital. Despite all the talk of booming economic growth and high quality of life in places like North Carolina's Research Triangle or Nashville or Denver, the business world still sees the safest bet to be in two of the biggest and most expensive cities in the country. This is a little too reminiscent of all the wealth being concentrated in the capital of Panem in *The Hunger Games*, while the other territories struggle.

This is bad because, as Stacey Mitchell speculates, basically every big city in the country just gave Amazon a ton of unbelievably valuable data and information about the city's economic outlook, likely development plans, and so on. Amazon now collectively knows more about the short-term and long-term economic outlook for 20 cities in North America than any competitor in any field.

This is bad for myself as a northern Virginia resident, because this is going to bring another 25,000 or so new employees to Crystal City, in an area where the once-reliable Metro system is struggling to get “back to good” — a slogan that quietly admits Metro is currently “not good” — and traffic gets worse each year. As I wrote last year, the weather is miserable three seasons out of four, the cost of living is high, and the speed cameras and parking enforcement are out of a futuristic dystopia. Other localities have gone bonkers offering corporate welfare to entice Amazon; one can only wonder what Arlington will give them.

On paper, this decision seems rational. But how much time has Amazon's selection team really spent in Crystal City? Yes, it's a bit more pedestrian-friendly than it used to be and the restaurant selection is getting better. But the architecture is brutal, the nearest highways and on-ramps look like a plate of spaghetti, the Metro station is small, and I can only imagine how they're going to deal with parking needs for thousands of new commuters. And with Amazon's Jeff Bezos already owning the Washington Post, Amazon's big expansion into the D.C. area will fuel more talk that the world's richest man is becoming more and more powerful in the nation's capital.