

# St. Louis Business Journal

## Editorial: Go East

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As the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency narrows its site selection for a new headquarters in the metropolitan area, our region once again finds itself immersed in internecine warfare.

Will the 3,000 jobs land in Illinois or Missouri? Is the North St. Louis site too bogged down in litigation to effectively compete? Is the St. Louis County site too suburban?

What role will politics play both locally and nationally?

As the city scrambles to bring together the disparate pieces of property in North St. Louis, seeking \$20 million to purchase what it doesn't own, Southern Illinois offers a site free of litigation and under government control.

This search has been a bonanza for consultants and engineers as study after study has taken place. Currently everyone is holding his/her breath for the CH2M Hill study that combines an environmental assessment and addresses quality of life issues. Results are anticipated in September with a final decision coming in March 2016.

If politics weren't in play, there is much to suggest the Illinois site should be favored. Its 178 acres can expand to more than 200 acres. There's a new highway interchange, exit 21, under construction.

Most significantly, the site is next to Scott Air Force Base. That offers many benefits to NGA, not the least of which is access to one of its largest customers, USTRANSCOM with headquarters at Scott. Then there's the access to Scott's clubs, retail and the talent that travels between the base and the NGA.

But politics clearly are at play. Will it matter more that the governor of Missouri is a Democrat or the president of the United States is from Illinois? Hmmm ..

At the end of the day, all politics are local. We think the most compelling reason for choosing the Illinois site is to reinforce the stability of Scott itself. The base's economic impact on the region is \$3 billion and growing. This would help cement Scott's value as further base reductions are anticipated in a shrinking defense budget.

Losing the NGA hurts the city's budget, especially where earnings taxes are concerned, but losing Scott would be a much larger regional blow.

The city should continue its efforts toward land assemblage in North St. Louis. As the regional economy grows, the site will be needed. In the meantime, however, the Illinois site deserves the most serious consideration for the good of the NGA and for the best of the region.