

# THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

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## No need for new jail

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A quarter-billion-dollar jail makes little sense in the best of times, let alone our present economic depression. Lacking any evidence that jails make us safer, the “need” for a new jail is also lacking.

From a high of 1,126 in 2008 to approximately 800 prisoners today, as well as the layoff of 60-plus jail staffers last year, all evidence points to the opposite conclusion. This trend is reflected nationwide, due in large part to the aging of America. Older people are simply less capable of many of the things which lead to jail.

The “overcrowding” for which the sheriff claims to need a new jail may easily be reduced by 1) adequate mental health facilities in the community; 2) exercising the sheriff’s right to refuse the 80-plus federal prisoners currently in his custody; 3) eliminating jail for failure to pay court-ordered fines (debtor’s prison).

The No New Jail Coalition agrees that the downtown jail needs upgrading; that a downtown community reintegration center may be a good idea; that the Geiger facility needs replacing. But all of this may be done for a fraction of the money our spendthrift county commissioners would take from our pockets.

**Michael Poulin**

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