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So many locked up in Alachua County

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Both State Attorney Bill Cervone and Sheriff Sadie Darnell should be commended on reducing the jail population for Alachua County. Undoubtedly, this will save county tax payers lots of money in times of economic hardships.

However, an argument could be made that it is business as usual, and their effort has been somewhat akin to rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic as it is sinking. The numbers make it appear that as the jail population goes down the number of people being sent to state prisons goes up.

Three salient points remain unchanged.

The first is that Alachua County's overall jail/prison rate remains higher than that of the state of Florida which is higher than that of the U.S. and that is higher than any country on God's green earth.

Second, Alachua County has a major drug addiction problem which fuels a crime wave that does not need to be.

There is much talk of the source of this crime wave being associated with inmates getting out of the iron triangle coming to Alachua because it is a liberal community.

This undoubtedly has some merit and to what degree is unknown.

There is another and a more compelling argument I have heard voiced in the state and federal prisons where I do programs: Gainesville is magnet for drug dealers because the demand is enormous.

We only have to open a couple of windows to get a sense of the power of this magnet.

The first window was not all that long ago, when the Gainesville Police Department busted a drug ring that had brought an estimated \$27 million worth of cocaine into the community.

Last year another window relating to the scope of the drug problem in Gainesville was opened.

The employees of a local freight company discovered one of their consignments was 1,000 pounds of marijuana. The Gainesville Police Department estimated its street value at \$1 million.

A casual reading of The Gainesville Sun reflects two new phrases have become common in the lexicon of local and national news reporting. They are "home invasions," and "grow houses."

The home invasion issue is tricky because both law enforcement and drug dealers have been known to act on erroneous information.

It matters not who is right or wrong because innocent people have been terrorized, maimed and killed in the process.

The third and last point is the easiest to make. Alachua county educational systems are dysfunctional. Alachua County has the 18th highest dropout rate and 11th lowest graduation rate in a state of 67 counties.

The numbers become more alarming when looked at over a 10-year period. In 1998-99 the high school graduation rate was 63.3 percent, and in 2007-08 it climbed to 69.3 percent.

We are talking of a graduation rate of less than 3 out of 4 students that has essentially remained unchanged for decades.

This is a county of about 260,000 residents where the economic engines are education, medicine and assorted government bureaucracies.

We are talking of statistics that put Alachua County at the bottom of a state that is among the bottom scholastic rungs of a nation.

It is the dropouts generated by a dysfunctional educational system that provide the necessary but expendable foot soldiers of the drug trade that connect the cartels of the drug world to the educated professionals addicted to the "responsible use of recreational drugs."

Now tell me, is not the argument of declining jail populations a feel-good red herring camouflaging a serious problem of a dysfunctional educational system in a drug addicted community?

These are facts that every elected official from the city to governor has known for decades.

These facts seem to work for them as they not only remain a part of the political picture but move up to ever increasing roles of responsibility.