

Tragic Unemployment Numbers Underscore Excruciating Moral Dilemma

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Nearly 3.2 million Americans applied for unemployment last week, bringing the total to 33 million since the coronavirus pandemic began in the U.S. seven weeks ago.

Southern Evangelical Seminary (SES, [www.ses.edu](#)) President and evangelical leader Dr. Richard Land says these tragic, grievous unemployment numbers underscore the excruciating moral dilemma which confronts Americans at the moment.

“On the one hand, we want to protect people from getting the coronavirus,” Land said. “However, we also understand that buried in these horrendous unemployment numbers is manifold human tragedy—people who have lost the small business that represents the savings of a lifetime to bankruptcy and people who are facing eviction from their homes or possibly losing the home they have been paying mortgages on for 15 or more years. Federal research reveals that during the last serious economic downturn in 2008, which is a minor ripple compared to these numbers, for every 1 point the unemployment rate went up, the suicide rate went up 1%. If that research holds true, tens of thousands of Americans will commit suicide in the coming months amid hopelessness and despair after losing their jobs and, in many cases, their lifetime savings through no fault of their own—not bad business decisions, not flagrant spending—but simply because their government shut down the economy.

“In addition, government research shows the last economic downturn generated a significant increase in drug abuse and

addiction,” Land added. “So the cruel reality is that what we’re facing in America is not a choice between saving lives and restarting the economy, but how many lives will be ruined or lost by rampant economic dislocation vs. people who will get sick—and some will die—from the coronavirus. To present the dilemma as anything simpler than that is disingenuous.

“So what do we do?” he continued. “It seems to me that the morally prudent thing to do is to make every effort to get our economy up and running as rapidly as possible while at the same time taking extra precautions to protect the most vulnerable among us—the elderly and those with life-compromising conditions, such as COPD, asthma, diabetes, heart disease and people’s whose immune systems have been compromised, etc. In other words, let’s take the precautions we need to take to protect the vulnerable and let everyone else get back to work.

“In addition, we need to understand that America is a very diverse place, as the coronavirus pandemic has vividly illustrated for us,” Land concluded. “Approximately 40% of all coronavirus cases in the U.S. have occurred in three states: New York, New Jersey and Massachusetts, which happen to represent approximately 11% of the U.S. population. On the other hand, California, Florida and Texas represent the three most populous states—totaling more than a quarter of the population. And yet their coronavirus experience has been radically different than New York, New Jersey and Massachusetts. If there was ever a vivid illustration of why one size doesn’t fit all, this is it. There has seldom been a stronger case to be made for American federalism than the current coronavirus epidemic. The federal government should be allowing, while constantly keeping in mind the rights acknowledged and protected by the Constitution, the various states to make whatever arrangements and accommodations they feel will best protect their citizens from illness and from economic devastation.”