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Adams: Real jobs, real lives in governor's hands

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Guest Columnist

Gov. Mark Sanford has a huge responsibility on his hands. The jobs and well-being of thousands of South Carolinians literally hang on his decision of whether to accept and use \$700 million in federal stimulus money.

The vast majority of South Carolinians who have lost their jobs and homes in the past year didn't do anything wrong. They were working hard and playing by the rules. Job losses are hurting the unemployed, their families and the businesses that served them.

People now hurting in South Carolina didn't work on Wall Street. They weren't the decision-makers for giant banks. We were not a part of the scandals that have brought down the financial system and infected the entire economy. Yet though we weren't the culprits, South Carolinians have been condemned to the worst of the economic fallout.

So, will the governor help South Carolinians who are hurting, or let things get worse?

South Carolina is slated to receive federal stimulus money that the governor can use to save jobs and keep some of the services that help our most distressed citizens. Instead, he has chosen a course that will cost thousands more jobs, to make a political point.

The \$700 million in limbo is a tiny freckle to California, New York and Texas, where Mr. Sanford is being praised by ideologues; they applaud our governor's "principled" stand (while they take their stimulus money and run). But in a poor state that is hurting, \$700 million equates to several vital organs. Not using it to stimulate our economy right now will touch every single person.

The governor's position sounds great — until you think about it. He wants to use the money to pay our state debt instead of paying state bills that are due now. Debt reduction is fantastic if you can pay your current bills, but after losing more than a billion dollars last year, state government can't do both.

Try this analogy: If my wife lost her job, we would lose 30 percent of our income. We couldn't pay our monthly bills for very long, and would have to sell our house (or lose it). Suddenly, our family is blessed with a \$20,000 loan that we will not have to pay until we regain our income. If we pay down our mortgage, we'll save around \$125 a month — a nice savings, but we'd still lose our house, because it wouldn't be enough to pay our bills. Or we could use that \$20,000 to help pay our monthly bills while my wife looked for another job. In the real world, we wouldn't even be considering the first option. It's just common-sense.

It seems the economic crisis hasn't become a reality for the governor. If the mortgage crisis doesn't affect you, if you don't have a problem paying your bills or if you haven't lost your job, then (like the governor) it might be hard to see the real needs of those who are unemployed and underemployed. But one in nine South Carolinians is out of work. Our state lost jobs at the fastest rate in the nation in 2008. Real people are hurting.

The thousands of jobs and services the governor now holds in his hands will impact almost everyone, even if you don't work in government.

Small business owners are already gasping at their lost revenue from 2008. Because South Carolina hasn't added or kept private-sector jobs in the past seven years, a high percentage of the customers who come through businesses' doors are teachers, police officers, firefighters, state or local government employees. If the governor doesn't let the Legislature save these state

jobs and services with the federal stimulus money, the pool of customers will dwindle at your electronics shop, doctor's office, dress store, car repair garage, restaurant, financial services business, etc. Local businesses with government contracts will suffer lost revenue.

If you're not convinced, please understand that even if the governor doesn't use the stimulus money, we will still have to pay for it. Our citizens will be paying for money going to other states through our federal taxes. As a recent column by Lt. Gov. Andre Bauer said, if the stimulus isn't accepted, South Carolinians will be getting a salad and paying for the nation to eat steak.

The folks who aren't impacted by the stimulus debate call Gov. Sanford's stand commendable leadership. Those who have to deal with the real effects of his decision have called his stand incompetent leadership. To those who will lose business and jobs as a result (if the governor fails to change his stand), it will be immoral leadership.

I can only hope that the governor has made his point to the nation, fought for his beliefs and now will accept the help that the people he was elected to serve so desperately need.

Mr. Adams is the Richland County treasurer.