

Don't be deceived by president's demeanor

As expected, President Obama has begun his campaign to promote abortion from the White House. Instead of simply reacting angrily, proliferators need to breathe deeply and think seriously about what's going on and what's likely to happen next.

In particular, the more gullible among those who usually are described as social conservatives need to resist the temptation of imagining that because Obama takes a low-key, seemingly reasonable approach, what he's doing really isn't so bad.

Something written by Washington Post columnist E. J. Dionne, Jr. provides a useful key to grasping that point.

Writing after the President's executive order that restored funding to groups which perform and promote abortion overseas, Dionne – an Obama partisan and faithful Democrat – said Obama had waited until the day after the annual March for Life in order to “poach constituencies” from the Republicans by presenting an appearance of non-confrontational moderation.

If Dionne is correct – and almost certainly he is – that goes a long way to undercut the foolish reaction of those individuals who felt, or professed to feel, that Obama was doing them a favor by not sticking it to the prolife movement while the marchers were still in town.

I have in mind people like “progressive evangelical” Jim Wallis of Sojourners, who reacted to the executive order by gushing that the president was “showing respect” and creating “a new common ground” by waiting 24 hours to do the deed. One can only suppose that Wallis is the kind of chap who, after being punched in the nose, hastens to thank his assailant for not also punching him in the stomach.

Among other things, Wallis' reaction ignores the fact that in postponing the executive order until late in the day on a Friday and then avoiding fanfare about it, President Obama saved himself needless headaches by delaying most media coverage until Saturday – the day of the week when people pay the least attention to

the news.

So, Obama's repeal of the "Mexico City policy" has gotten the administration's pro-abortion ball rolling. What comes next? The president says he looks forward to working with Congress on restoring federal money to the United Nations population agency and its abortion programs. Administration sources sketch the same scenario - Congress and White House working in tandem - for lifting the restrictions on federal funding of embryonic stem cell research that President Bush imposed by limiting it to cell lines that existed at the time of his decision.

Others think there's a good chance that an attempt will be made to repeal the Hyde Amendment barring federal money for Medicaid abortions. (Reportedly under pressure from Obama to compromise, Speaker Nancy Pelosi and the House Democrats dropped from the economic stimulus package a provision for non-Medicaid contraception and abortion which critics called a bailout for the abortion industry.) Waiting in the wings is the Freedom of Choice Act elevating abortion to the status of a fundamental right in the eyes of the law.

What's discernible in all this is Obama's desire to let Congress do as much of the dirty work on abortion as he can. The president for his part will back the pro-abortion measures even while declaring respect for those who disagree and piously expressing hope that the number of abortions will decline.

Against this background, it should be clear that social conservatives who then suppose they're scoring points because Obama's demeanor is mild and his rhetoric is moderate will have earned the punching around they're likely to get at the hands of this very smart man and his friends.

Russell Shaw is a freelance writer.