

# If Obama comes up short, we'll all be in hot water

If sports is a metaphor of life, Barack Obama needs to take a look at the Washington Redskins. The Washington football team started out like gangbusters this year, but it swooned at mid-season and finished out of the NFL playoffs. Obama, beware.

Who can doubt that our president-elect had a terrific 2008, assisted by an economic crisis and cheered on by pom-pom wavers in an obsequious press corps? But come Jan. 20, inauguration day, the game is for real. And even the pom-pom wavers – perhaps especially they – can turn mean terribly fast.

Every president takes the oath of office amid hopes and fears, but none since Ronald Reagan has come to office surrounded by quite so many expectations and anxieties as Obama.

Many of the expectations are grossly unrealistic. Obama is an extremely talented man, but no matter how talented he is, many of the problems he'll face as president fall in the category of intractable. Which is to say: devilishly hard to solve and in some cases lacking acceptable solutions.

Very soon, though, America's problems will be Obama's problems. But they are our problems too, and, considered in that light, it would be crazy for anyone to hope our extremely talented new president fails. From fighting the recession and straightening out medical care, to deflecting Iran's nuclear ambitions, deterring international terrorism, and calming the Middle East, if Obama comes up short, not just he, but all of us, will be in hot water.

The exception to this rule is the set of concerns commonly called "social issues." On these matters – abortion, gay marriage, and the like – moral conservatives understandably hope that the president either pulls back or else falls on his face. Unfortunately, neither thing seems very likely.

During the year past, Catholics have been involved in a sometimes ugly intramural spat over Obama's intentions on abortion. The claims of Catholics who backed him

during the campaign generally reflected what can only charitably be called wishful thinking. Once he was in the White House, these folks repeatedly told us, he could be trusted not to act as pro-abortion as he had acted for years and as he had promised during the campaign he would continue to act.

Now it's almost the moment of truth. And the weeks of the transition haven't been encouraging – a bevy of pro-choice cabinet choices, including Tom Daschle as health and human services secretary and administration point man on health care reform, plus a cluster of pro-abortion types in key White House posts.

Word from the transition team was that Obama would act quickly to overturn Bush policies like barring funding for groups that promote abortion overseas and limiting government subsidies for embryonic stem cell research to existing cell lines.

Beyond these things lies the Freedom of Choice Act declaring abortion a fundamental right and supplying the statutory basis for overturning virtually all federal and state restrictions on it. As everyone surely is aware by now, Obama cosponsored the bill as a senator and said that as president he'd sign it into law if he got the chance. Despite soothing voices from the Catholic left, the best way to give him that chance is by neglecting to fight FOCA.

Like Obama, moral conservatives also need to learn a lesson from football: Don't let your guard down on abortion with this administration or they'll probably go for the bomb. Hope and pray President Obama succeeds on many things. Hope and pray he fails on this. Work hard to bring that about.

Russell Shaw is a freelance writer.