



## READERS' VIEWS

### Passport puts Medicaid back on track

To the editor:  
When I started practicing medicine in Bardstown, Ky. almost 35 years ago, I was optimistic about my opportunity to make sick children well and to watch healthy children grow into strong adults. Even though I started out with a slightly naïve view, I'm very proud to say I've had a hand in caring for thousands of Kentucky's children.

I made a commitment to serve Medicaid patients at the very beginning of my career, but I was not enthusiastic when managed care arrived in 1997. My staff and the staff at Passport Health Plan will attest to my reservations during the start-up. On one hand, I was right to be cautious; there were administrative and technology issues that created burdens on my practice. On the other hand, Passport worked hard to fix what wasn't working so doctors could focus on providing patient care.

But, the gap between where we were with Medicaid managed care then and where we are now is enormous.

Several recent articles point out that the state's attempt to save money by introducing three other Medicaid managed care plans outside the Passport region isn't going well. Maybe it was too much too soon.

My practice, Physicians to Children and Adolescents, serves more than 4,700 patients on Medicaid. Because of our locations in Bardstown and Springfield, some are covered by Passport, some by the other plans. I'm not a managed care expert, but my staff and I see and experience the differences daily. I suspect part of the difference is that Passport is a nonprofit and therefore never has to put the

expectations of shareholders before the needs of members.

I've been impressed enough with Passport's commitment to the Commonwealth to accept an offer to join its Board of Directors. From this vantage point, I've been able to confirm what I have long suspected: Passport Health Plan has a strong and engaged provider network, and an intense focus on delivering services at a cost that doesn't diminish quality. In fact, engaging with providers is one of the hallmarks of Passport's remarkable success. I feel that Passport's effectiveness, including its impressive clinical outcomes, are directly due to Physicians and other health professionals (throughout the service area) sitting at the table making key decisions and sharing sacrifices for the good of the Plan and the members. The National Committee on Quality Assurance recently ranked Passport as the 13th best Medicaid plan in America, which could not have been accomplished without an invested provider network and a top-notch staff.

As a member of the Board of Directors, I believe Passport stands willing and ready to help the state get Medicaid back on track. In addition to Jefferson, the Plan has been successfully serving 15 rural counties for 14 years and respects and understands their unique needs. Claims are paid on time, and members have access to doctors, pharmacies, hospitals and specialists. Passport is a strong and cost effective Medicaid plan that could be easily replicated throughout the Commonwealth.

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## LETTERS POLICY

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Address letters to Editor, Kentucky Standard, P.O. Box 639, Bardstown, Ky. 40004 or send via e-mail to news@ky-standard.com.

# Iran's terrible rationality and its actor

The chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Martin Dempsey, thinks that Iran is a 'rational actor' He is indisputably correct.

Iran has, quite rationally, concluded that if it spins thousands of centrifuges to enrich enough uranium, it will soon have the bomb. Just as rationally, it believes it can string the West along. Then there is its airtight chain of cause and effect in the alleged plot against the Saudi ambassador to the United States: If it hired a Mexican drug gang, and that gang blew up a Washington, D.C., restaurant, and the Saudi ambassador was dining there at the time, the ambassador would die. Q.E.D.

Gen. Dempsey said too little and too much about the Iranian regime. Tehran couldn't have made itself into the 'world's' foremost exporter of terror and extended its tentacles throughout the Middle East without resorting to rational calculation. That's obvious. What Dempsey is implying, though, is that a regime capable of such calculation can necessarily be deterred if it gets a nuclear weapon. That's an unsupportable leap.

If there's one thing we should have established beyond doubt during the past decade, it is that involvement in terror



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attacks on American soil is extremely costly to the perpetrators. Nonetheless, according to the U.S. government, the Iranians hatched a plot against the Saudi ambassador where the risk bore no relation whatsoever to the possible reward — from our perspective.

More fundamentally from our perspective, there is no point in establishing a theocracy, killing innocents abroad, pursuing sectarian war, crushing protesters, denying the Holocaust and threatening Israel with annihilation, either. From the point of view of the Western liberal tradition, the Islamic Republic itself makes no sense. Yet there it is, withstanding punishing economic sanctions to pursue the weapon that the regime wouldn't want in the first place if it accepted international norms.

If the Soviets, the famous 'evil empire' bris-

ting with thousands of nuclear weapons, could be deterred, why not Iran? The Soviet leadership became more pragmatic over time. After Nikita Khrushchev renounced Josef Stalin, it didn't believe that war with its enemies was imminent and inevitable. Iran's religio-ideological fire, in contrast, is still burning hot.

A highly ideological leadership with a sense of desperate urgency is the enemy of deterrence. In 1941, Dean Acheson rightly said: 'No rational Japanese could believe an attack on us could result anything but disaster' Except the Japanese -- driven by a sense of honor alien to us -- believed that they only had two choices: getting squeezed out of China by the U.S., or launching a risky war.

Even in the Cold War, deterrence almost failed. During the Cuban Missile Crisis, the airstrike and invasion pushed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff might well have unwittingly prompted a nuclear exchange. The defense secretary at the time, the late Bob McNamara, maintained that "we lucked out." Ah, yes, that crucial backstop to deterrence -- luck.

The Israelis can be forgiven for not feeling very lucky. Do we think Israeli

Prime Minister Bibi Netanyahu and Ayatollah Ali Khamenei will establish a "red telephone" to smooth out misunderstandings after Iran goes nuclear? The Iranian regime is factionalized, and it is sure to be the most fanatical elements that control the nukes. It is also prone to bouts of popular unrest threatening its existence. If the regime ever believes it is going down, national martyrdom might look gloriously alluring.

In March 1945, Adolf Hitler gave his infamous Nero Decree, essentially calling for the destruction of Germany. After the first U.S. atomic attack on Hiroshima, the Japanese war minister mused about how wonderful it would be if his nation were destroyed 'like a beautiful flower.' It is in this tradition that former Iranian President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani -- a relative pragmatist -- said that 'even one nuclear bomb inside Israel will destroy everything. However, it will only harm the Islamic world. It is not irrational to contemplate such an eventuality'

On his own perverse terms, Rafsanjani's reasoning is unassailable. He's just another 'rational actor.'

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# Gulf War III isn't an option for the U.S.

We've heard this quickening drumbeat before. Last time, it led to the tragic invasion and occupation of Iraq. This time, if we let the drummers provoke us into war with Iran, the consequences will likely be far worse.

Rat-tat-tat. Weapons of mass destruction. Boom-shakka-boom. A madman in charge. Thump-thump-thump. Mushroom clouds.

Tune out the anxiety-inducing percussion and think for a minute. Yes, there are good reasons to be concerned about the Iranian nuclear program. But it doesn't follow that launching a military attack — or providing support for an attack by Israel — would necessarily be effective, let alone wise. The evidence suggests it would be neither.

Obviously, Iranian officials are lying when they say that their nuclear program is entirely for peaceful purposes. But it is clear that Iran does not yet have the ability to build a nuclear weapon — and unclear whether the Iranian government, if and when it does achieve that capability, will take that final provocative step.

Covert operations believed to have been carried out by Israeli intelligence agents, perhaps with U.S. assistance — a diabolically clever computer virus that crippled many of Iran's enrichment centrifuges,



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along with the targeted assassinations of key Iranian scientists — have significantly slowed Iran's progress toward being able to make a bomb. It is reasonable to assume that such actions, and their effectiveness, will continue.

But let's also assume that sabotage, in the end, will not be enough to keep Iran from reaching its goal. What then?

First, it seems to me, you have to figure out why the Iranian regime has gone to the trouble and expense of mounting a nuclear program in the first place. If you string together enough examples of the apocalyptic, anti-Semitic rhetorical venom that spews regularly from both religious and secular authorities in Iran, you might believe that as soon as the first nuclear-tipped missile came off the assembly line it would be sent hurtling toward Israel. But if you

look at the way the regime actually behaves, you'd have to conclude otherwise.

The Iranian government acts in ways that are inimical to the interests of Israel, the United States, our Western allies and the Arab states of the Persian Gulf. But it does not act in ways that are inherently irrational.

The regime wants Iran to be able to dominate the region as it did in the days of the Persian Empire. Like all dictatorial governments, it also wants to perpetuate its hold on power. Achieving nuclear capability would serve both these goals; a suicidal attack against Israel or the United States would serve neither.

It is worth mentioning that the regime's superpower ambitions were greatly furthered by the U.S. decision to go to war against Iraq, thus eliminating Iran's chief rival. When Saddam Hussein had chemical weapons, he used them on his own people and against Iran, not against the West.

It's also worth mentioning that Iranian leaders might look at Iraq and Libya, which abandoned their nuclear programs, and then look at North Korea, which did not, and conclude logically that the best way for a "rogue" government to survive is to make a bomb.

My guess is that the Iranians might stop short of actually testing a nuclear

device. Simply letting the world know they're able to make one would give them the added clout they seek.

To be sure, a world with a nuclear-capable Iran would be a more dangerous place — especially for Israel and the United States, but also for Saudi Arabia and every other nation within missile range. But is there an alternative?

Iran is a huge country, and its nuclear facilities are widely dispersed across forbidding terrain — in some cases, buried deep in mountainsides. I am not convinced that an Israeli air attack, even with logistical support from the United States and its regional allies, would be able to accomplish more than delay the nuclear program by a few years.

The United States could do a more definitive job. But we would be talking about a massive, sustained bombing campaign of the kind that preceded the Iraq invasion. We're not talking about some kind of one-day "surgical" strike. It would be war.

Are you ready for Gulf War III? If not, the only choice is to continue with diplomacy and sanctions. They aren't great options, but they're the best we've got.

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