

# Afghans cast ballots amid tight security

**KABUL,** — People of Afghanistan began voting Thursday morning amid tight security to elect the country's president and 420 members of the provincial councils. Some 17 million Afghans are eligible to vote while the turnout is expected to be lower than in 2004 as security situation is getting worse in most areas of the country.

In the capital city Kabul and other provinces, people are standing in queues casting their votes in favor of their candidates. There are 6,500 voting centers and some 29,000 polling booths throughout the country, but hundreds of polling stations are expected to be closed down due to security reasons. Eight of Afghanistan's 364 districts remain wholly under Taliban control and will not be able to hold elections, according to Interior Minister Mohammad Hanif Atmar.

The voting coincided with Taliban-linked violent incidents in Kabul and some other cities, people are using their franchise with fervor. The voting began at 7:00 a.m. local time and would continue until 04:00 p.m., with the possibility of extension.

Taliban militant have threatened to disrupt the election while over 200,000 Afghan and the NATO-led international forces have been assigned to ensure security for the process. In the latest incident Thursday, rocket attack carried out by Taliban insurgents in Yaqubi district of Khost province in east



*Afghan President Hamid Karzai holds up his inked stained finger after voting in the presidential election in Kabul August 20, 2009.*

Afghanistan killed one civilian and injured two children, a local official said. "The rocket fired by rebels hit a residential house in Yaqubi district this morning killing one civilian and wounding two others both children," head of health department in the province Amir Badshah Mangal told Xinhua. Earlier in the day, police in Kabul killed two suspected suicide bombers in eight district, a police officer said. "Three suicide bombers took position in a building and attempted to target police station in 8th precinct but police shot them dead before going to action killing two of them," a police officer at the site of the incident told Xinhua but he refused to be identified. Meantime, Taliban purported spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid in talks with media via telephone from an undisclosed location claimed responsibility, add-

ing the militants were fighting with police. Taliban fighters who have vowed to derail the voting process have carried out several rockets and bomb attacks in parts of the country including their birthplace Kandahar. Rocket attacks earlier killed four security personnel in Ghormach district of northwest Faryab province Thursday morning while four rockets attacked Kandahar but caused no loss of life.

Moreover, skirmishes and militants activities claimed the life of police district chief in northern Baghlan province while two insurgents have been killed in Imam Sahib district of Kunduz province. Among the remaining 32 presidential candidates, incumbent President Hamid Karzai is leading in popularity and favor. A latest poll showed that Karzai enjoyed 44 percent votes while his main rival Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, former Foreign Minister with Karzai government, got 26 percent. The Afghan Election Commission said initial result of presidential election would be announced 48 hours after the vote ends while preliminary result would be announced on Sept. 3 and official result will be finalized on Sept. 17.

The election is a test for U.S. government's new strategy for Afghanistan. U.S. President Barack Obama has deployed 30,000 extra troops in Afghanistan this year, increasing the total number of foreign troops to 100,000, including 63,000 Americans. The U.S. military said Wednesday six U.S. soldiers were killed in separate incidents, raising American troops' death toll to 32 this month. **Xinhua**

# View Point

By Kate Randall

The Obama administration has indicated that it will not insist on a "public option" as part of its overhaul of the US health care system. The move signals the abandonment of the only fig leaf of "reform" in the administration's cost-cutting health care scheme. It represents a complete capitulation to the insurance industry, which lobbied intensively against any government-run insurance plan.

"The public option, whether we have it or we don't have it, is not the entirety of health care reform," Obama stated at a town-hall meeting Saturday in Grand Junction, Colorado. "This is just one sliver of it, one aspect of it."

A series of White House officials appeared on television interview programs Sunday and broadly hinted at the administration's abandonment of the public option. Interviewed on CNN's "State of the Union" program, Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius said that a government-run plan is "not the essential element" of Obama's health care initiative.

White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs, appearing on CBS News' "Face the Nation" program, indicated that Obama could be "satisfied" without the public option.

In place of the public option, the White House is reportedly prepared to accept a proposal from the Senate Finance Committee to create "non-profit health insurance cooperatives." The author of the measure, Democratic Senator Kent Conrad of North Dakota, appearing on "Fox News Sunday," said, "The fact of the matter is there are not the votes in the United States Senate for a public option. There never have been."

He neglected to explain that there are not sufficient votes in the Senate—which the Democrats control with a "veto-proof" 60 to 40 majority—because he and a sizable number of his fellow Democrats staunchly oppose even the token public plan proposed by Obama. They oppose it because it would cut into private insurers' control of the health insurance market and reduce the windfall profits they stand to reap from the administration's proposed overhaul.

The dropping of the public option only underscores the fact that the terms of the health care overhaul are being dictated by the insurance industry, the big hospital chains and the pharmaceutical companies. Obama himself in earlier statements and press conferences declared that a public insurance option was essential to rein in the insurance companies and prevent them from gouging the public.

He now stands condemned by his own words of aiding and abetting a corporate scheme to boost the profits of the health care industry—and slash labor costs for the rest of big business—by forcing working people to purchase bare-bones private insurance at inflated prices.

On the question of health care, as in every other aspect of public policy, the major financial and corporate interests exercise veto power.

Speaking Monday on NBC's "Today Show," the former chairman of the Democratic National Committee, Howard Dean, criticized the dropping of the public option, saying, "What's going on in the health insurance industry is very much like what was going on, in my view, on Wall Street over the last eight years. People just basically taking money out of your pockets and putting it in theirs. None of that money goes to health care."

The cave-in on the public option—which, in any event, was conceived of as a dumping ground for people unable to afford private insurance—is a continuation of the administration's groveling before corporate interests. The White House has been in continual discussions with the pharmaceutical lobby. Recently, it publicly reassured the drug companies that it would follow through on a secret pledge to block any legislation that would allow the government to negotiate drug prices or import cheaper drugs from Canada.

The Obama administration is pushing for the elimination of the existing "fee-for-service" system, in which health care providers are reimbursed for each patient visit or procedure. It advocates replacing this with a "global payments" system, in which doctors and hospitals would be compensated for services performed over a period of time, thus imposing dollar limits on health care for working people.

This means rationing health care for most Americans, who would be denied access to more expensive tests, drugs or procedures unless they were able to pay high additional fees over and above their insurance premiums.

In the name of cost-cutting "efficiencies," Obama has also proposed slashing \$600 billion from the Medicare and Medicaid programs.

During the presidential campaign, Obama opposed the so-called "individual mandate," under which every individual is legally required to have health insurance. This reactionary approach puts the onus on the consumer, rather than the health care companies, imposing fines on people who are not insured under an employer-provided plan and fail to purchase private insurance.

Early on in his health care drive, President Obama changed his position and adopted the individual mandate approach in order to assure the insurance giants that they stood to reap large profits under his scheme.

The health insurance co-ops proposed by the Senate Finance Committee are in no way a public alternative. Membership in these groups, a number of which already exist in states across the county, is not free of charge and the co-ops often reject prospective members. Costs are similar to premiums paid to private insurers.

The scrapping of the public option is one more indication of the reactionary character of the entire health care overhaul. The provision of quality health care as a basic human right is incompatible with a system based on corporate profit and administered by a political establishment beholden to a financial oligarchy.

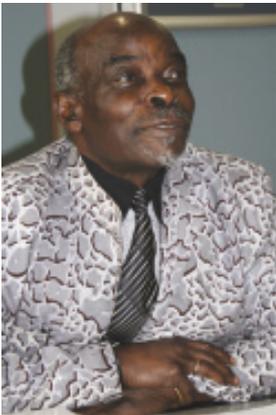
The manifest failure of the present health care system in the US—which leaves some 50 million people (one sixth of the population) without any form of insurance—is precisely due to the subordination of health care to private profit.

The fight for a health care system that corresponds to the needs of the population requires a political struggle against the capitalist profit system and the two parties of big business that defend it. Socialist medicine—based on the nationalization of the hospital chains, pharmaceutical companies and insurance giants and their transformation into utilities democratically controlled by the working class—is the only basis for providing high quality health care for all.



Republic of Namibia

## Ministry of Information and Communication Technology



# 66<sup>th</sup>

## Happy 66<sup>th</sup> birthday Prime Minister Nahas Angula!

On the occasion of your 66<sup>th</sup> birthday, the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology, on behalf of the Cabinet and the Namibian Government wishes you many happy returns, Rt. Hon. Prime Minister

May you be blessed with strength, wisdom and vision to inspire further innovations and productivity in the Namibian Public Service

We wish you good health and happiness for today and for the rest of the year!

*Mainy happy returns!*