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Population control

A REFRESHING political force hit town recently. I was in the audience when Rep. Patricia Schroeder, D-Colo., hammered on the awesome threats posed by overpopulation.

She said that uncontrolled population growth drives all of the other ecological problems facing the planet today, and that no one should consider herself or himself an environmentalist if she or he didn't work in some way to promote population policy. As an effective political leader, she recognizes the real threat.

Many people focus on starvation as a consequence of overpopulation, as Dr. Malthus did in the last century. But there is another, more immediate threat that looms. Overwhelming numbers of people are breaking our ability to govern, to run the state or country, to deliver water, food, education, transportation and amenities.

In California, we are running out of clean air and clean water, open space, landfill space, and time. There is a disgraceful lack of affordable housing, and traffic gridlock pervades the state's highway system. It seems that each new immigrant comes with an automobile attached at the hip.

The world's population has doubled between 1950 and 1990 and we are reeling from the effects in California. This month the state passed the 30 million mark, up from just 7 million in 1940. Nearly 700,000 arrived last year alone.

It is preposterous to think we can keep slicing a finite pie into an infinite number of servings, on any government level. Everything America has stood for since the structuring of the Constitution is

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at risk. As long as our policymakers cringe from the issue and avoid focusing on how to slow the growth, the outcome will always be hopelessly short of the need. Our democratic government will inevitably collapse.

WATCH WHAT is going on in Sacramento and Washington. Blame is heaped on every source as the elected officials attempt to wrestle with the budget deficit.

Taxpayers blame the bureaucrats and politicians, the conservatives blame the poor and needy, and the liberals blame the conservatives for favoring the rich and pinching pennies. The tension and the anger mount. It has been at these moments in history when the ever-present little Hitlers have grabbed power.

Is anyone in government tackling the problem head on? Indeed some officials are, but not in this country. A United Nations report indicates that there are 57 countries with policies to slow the increasing rate of population.

China's one-child law may seem extreme, but the Chinese have learned, in ancient as well as modern times, from the tragedy of massive human death caused by overpopulation. Others, like Sweden and France, promote birth control nationwide.

In the U.S., we have gone the other way. Most of the action has been to pull aid for family planning from developing countries. Schroeder and a few others in Congress authored a bill for more effective birth control research as a beginning step to turn the tide.

SO WHAT do we, the voters, do when our political leaders seem willing to talk about anything but population policy? One answer is to look for new leaders.