VOA NEWS

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This is VOA news. I'm David Byrd in Washington.

Law enforcement authorities in northern California said Friday five people died in a wildfire, one of three in the state that have leveled thousands of homes and forced widespread evacuations.

The Butte County Sheriff's office said the victims were found dead in vehicles as they attempted to flee Paradise, a mountain town north of Sacramento. Paradise has been mostly destroyed in a quick-moving fire that forced thousands of residents to flee.

Patrick Knuthson escaped the fire. "Down my street, there's probably, if I had to guess, maybe 22 houses and there's two that are left. And the fire burned from one house, to the next house, to the next house until they were pretty much all gone."

In Southern California, the Woolsy fire pushed toward Malibu and the Pacific Ocean, prompting evacuations in Malibu, Calabasas, Agoura Hills and other areas.

Massive traffic jams clogged the Pacific coast highway near Malibu as residents tried to escape. One of the areas destroyed was the setting for dozens of Hollywood Westerns.

One of those fires is burning near the town of Thousand Oaks, California, where residents are still grieving Wednesday's deadly shooting at a country music club.

Rita Foley of AP reports.

Telemachus Orfanos was 27 years old and navy veteran with an easy smile say those who knew him. When she learned her son had been killed, a grieving Susan Schmidt-Orfanos said, "I don't want prayers, I don't want thoughts, I want gun control and I hope to God nobody else sends me more prayers. I want gun control. No. More. Guns."

Incoming California Governor Gavin Newsom: "This is America, gotta change. This doesn't happen anywhere else on planet Earth."

He wants to increase gun control.

I'm Rita Foley.

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Republican Senator Susan Collins of Maine says she wants the Senate to vote on legislation that would prevent President Trump from prematurely ending special counsel Robert Mueller's investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election.

Speaking in Brunswick, Maine, Collins said that she had serious concerns about the president's appointment of Matt Whitaker as acting attorney general overseeing the probe.

"When I read some of the comments that Mr. Whitaker has made about the parameters of the special counsel's investigation, it is a great cause for concern."

Whitaker, who was tapped by Trump this week to lead the Justice Department after the president fired Attorney General Jeff Sessions, will oversee all matters under the department's jurisdiction, including Mueller's investigation.

China has told the U.S. to stop sending American ships and military aircraft close to islands that Beijing claims in the South China Sea.

Top Chinese diplomat Yang Jiechi mad the government's position clear after the latest round of U.S.-China security talks in Washington Friday.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said the United States is not seeking to heighten tensions with China.

"Even as our countries confront important differences in the bilateral relationship between the nations, our cooperation remains essential on many, many central issues."

The Trump administration has criticized Beijing's militarization of the South China Sea, which is a vital waterway for world trade.

At least 23 people and four attackers were killed in Somalia Friday in three car bomb attacks Mogadishu. At least 45 people were wounded.

The militant group, al-Shabab, has claimed responsibility.

Hundreds of members of a migrant caravan making its way north to the United States left early Friday from the Jesus Martinez Stadium in Mexico City, eager to get back on the road.

About 5,000 migrants are camped at the improvised refugee shelter set up about a week ago in Mexico City. They are getting rest and medical care after several weeks of rugged travel conditions.

The migrants are from Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua and many say they are fleeing violence and poverty in their home countries.

Meanwhile in the United States, several civil rights groups have filed a federal lawsuit challenging the legality of U.S. President Donald Trump's newly announced restrictions, which would effectively ban illegal migrants from Mexico from qualifying for asylum.

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