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 MY PLAYLIST



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# A tribe in Arizona planned to connect 600 homes to electricity. Then the funding was cut

OCTOBER 7, 2025 · 5:00 AM ET

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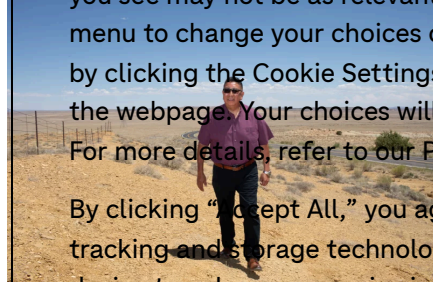
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By Nate Perez, Ryan Kellman

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3-Minute Listen

PLAYLIST TRANSCRIPT



For as long as 55-year-old Hopi Chairman Tim Nuvangyaoma has been alive, high-voltage power lines have cut across Hopi lands in northeast Arizona, carrying vast amounts of power long distances throughout the Southwest.

As a result of President Trump's signing his order, legislative social media features and analyze NPR's the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, in July, the tax credits for large-scale renewable energy projects will end if

But residents of the Hopi Reservation have never been connected to that grid. Instead, tribal members have relied on a single power line that runs roughly 30 miles east and west across high

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 2026, or if the project isn't placed into service by Dec. 31, 2027. Now, without those tax credits, Hopi Chairman Tim Nuvangyaoma (pictured here) and his tribe will have to go back to the drawing board to finance large-scale utility renewable energy projects that could power the entire reservation and provide an economic boost to the tribe.

desert punctuated by three distinctive mesas, home to 12 distinct villages, including some of the oldest inhabited communities in the United States.

List of Partners (service providers or vendors)

Those who live more than a mile away from that line — nearly 3,000 people — have no access to electricity. Families need to rely on generators to

Ryan Kellman/NPR

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The rest of the reservation is not connected to the grid, but the power is unreliable and outages can sometimes last days.

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"If you have a power surge or any kind of power outage, you're definitely going to lose that power to that equipment that somebody's life might be reliant on," Nuvangyaoma says.

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The tribe thought those days without reliable electricity were about to change.

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Under then-President Joe Biden, Congress passed the Inflation Reduction Act in 2022, providing nearly \$2 billion to tribes to invest in

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renewable energy.

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The Hopi Reservation spans more than 1.5 million acres, with 12

The Hopi were approved for a \$25 million grant to install solar panels and battery storage for around 600 homes through a program called Solar for All.

villages distinctly located across three mesas in northeast Arizona.

Some homes are located in the valleys, surrounded by four-wing saltbush, a shrub that can grow up to 3 feet, and juniper trees, which grow across the high desert plains.

But in August, the Trump administration terminated the Solar for All program, calling it wasteful.

Ryan Kellman/NPR

Now, the tribe will be lucky to power around 100 homes from a much smaller pot of funding

through a federal grant from the Tribal Electrification Program. Hopi officials say they will now have to decide who gets power and who doesn't.

"That's hard news to deliver, man," says Nuvangyaoma, "especially when you offer somebody hope and they're thinking, 'All right, finally we're getting somewhere' – and then the rug gets pulled out from them."



### A game changer for tribes

The situation on the Hopi Reservation isn't unique. An estimated 54,000 tribal members across Indian Country don't have access to electricity, according to a 2023 report from the Department of Energy's Office of Indian Energy Policy and Programs.

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Even those with power often deal with more frequent outages, says Wahleah Johns, who directed that office during the Biden administration.

"Tribal households face power outages 6.5 times more than the national average," she says.



That disparity dates back to the 1920s and 1930s, says Johns, when tribes were often left out as energy infrastructure was built across the West.

"As they [utility companies] were building out the transmission lines, they excluded tribes, tribal lands," she says.

On Aug. 7, the Environmental Protection Agency sent termination letters to all Solar for All grant awardees, including the Hopi Tribe,

which had been approved for \$25 million from the program. That money would have been used around 600 homes to solar power and battery-powered heaters.

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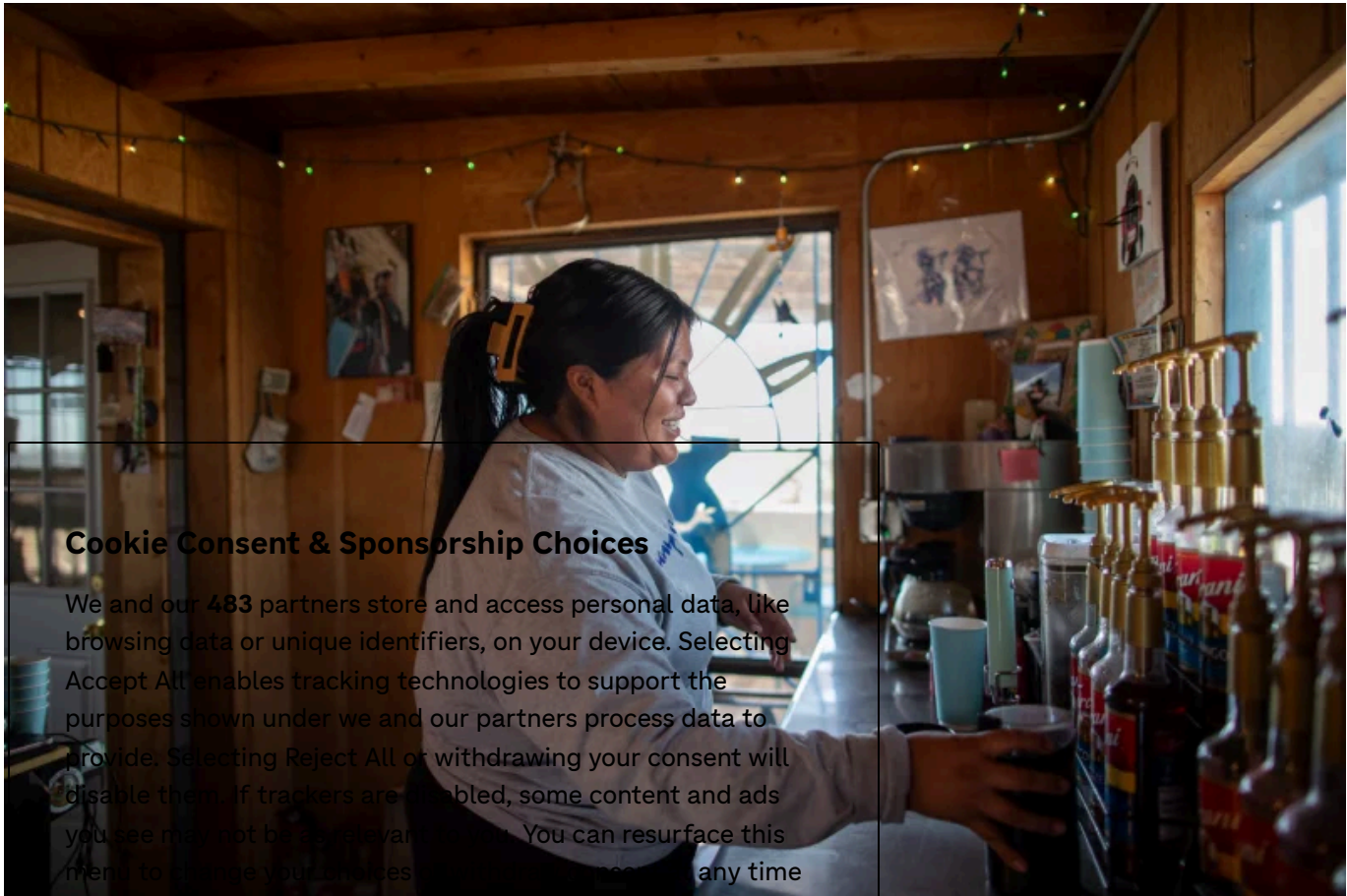
The Inflation Reduction Act was seen as a game changer for tribes across the country, says Johns, who's a member of the Navajo Nation.

The IRA allowed tribes for the first time to access tax credits to finance and expand renewable energy projects across Indian Country.

The law also provided billions of dollars in loan guarantees for tribes, including the Hopi.

Johns says the IRA pushed forward the Solar for All program, allowing residential solar for low-income and disadvantaged households across the nation. Programs like the Climate Pollution Reduction Grants were meant to accelerate the clean energy transition on tribal lands.

Most tribes couldn't afford major investments in energy infrastructure without that federal support, Johns says.



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by clicking the Cookie Settings & Opt Out link on the bottom of the webpage. Your choices will have effect within our website. Storm Tea mixes up a drink at Hopi Grounds, one of the businesses along the side of Route 264, the main thoroughfare that connects the three mesas of the reservation.

Ryan Kellman/NPR

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"[It's] estimated it costs over \$40,000 per mile to build out transmission lines," Johns says. "The median income's pretty low in tribal lands, and so to be able to afford that is just not gonna happen."

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According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the median non-Hispanic white household brings in \$81,604 annually, compared with the median yearly income of \$54,485 for non-Hispanic American Indian and Alaska Native households.

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But this summer, Congress rolled back much of that IRA funding after lawmakers passed President Trump's key legislative agenda, the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBA), which ends tax credits for large-scale renewable energy projects if construction begins after July 4, 2026, or if the project isn't placed into service by Dec. 31, 2027.

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Tribal and rural communities don't have a lot of access to capital to get renewable energy projects started, explains Pletcher Wilkinson, who is the energy manager at Hopi Utilities Corporation. That's why it is nearly impossible, he says, to get utility companies to invest.

"This bill [OBBB] hurts the Hopi Tribe and it hurts rural and remote communities, because it makes it harder to develop energy projects in these communities," Wilkinson says.



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In August, the Environmental Protection Agency announced it would also end the Solar for All program. The agency said the One Big Beautiful Bill Act halted future funding for the program, including money that had already been set aside for tribes.

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 EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin announced the change in a video posted to the agency's YouTube account.

Ryan Kellman/NPR

"EPA no longer has the authority to administer the program or the appropriated funds to keep

this boondoggle alive," he said.

But Pilar Thomas, who practices tribal energy and economic development law with the law firm Quarles & Brady, disagrees with that.

"All of the grant money was fully obligated," Thomas says. "Congress cannot rescind obligated funds."

The EPA did not respond to questions from NPR. Instead, the agency said in an emailed statement that it is working to implement the One Big Beautiful Bill Act in accordance with congressional intent. "The Trump EPA will continue to work with states, tribes, and communities to support projects that advance the agency's core mission of protecting human health and the environment."

**"A heck of a plan"**

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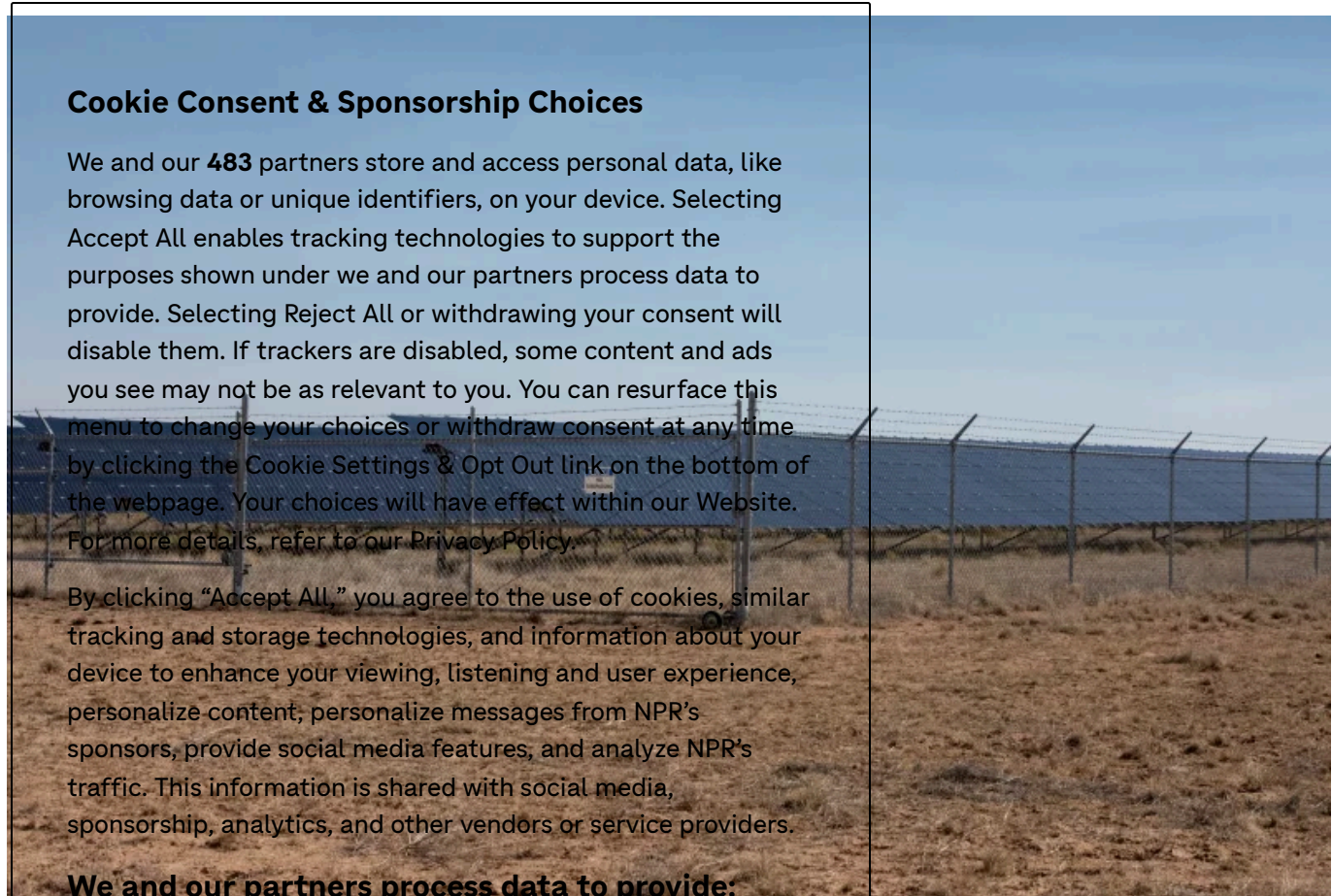
The rollbacks in the One Big Beautiful Bill Act are a major blow to tribes, including the Hopi. For years, the Hopi relied on the Navajo Generating Station, a coal-fired power plant on Navajo Nation land, for jobs and revenue. But in 2019, the plant's operators shut it down, and about 85% of the Hopi's revenue vanished.

An estimated 500,000 people across the country have access to electricity, according to a 2023 report from the Department of Energy's Office of Indian Energy Policy and Programs. That disparity dates back to the 1920s and 1930s, when tribes were often left out as energy infrastructure was built across the West, according to Wahleah Johns, a former director of the office.

Ryan Kellman/NPR

The unemployment rate on the reservation hovers around 12%, nearly three times higher than the national average.

NPR asked the White House why the administration canceled Solar for All. In an emailed statement, White House spokesperson Taylor Rogers responded that the president is bringing down energy costs and providing stability.



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One major solar project that is already operating on the Hopi lands is the Hopi Arsenic Mitigation Project, which treats water contaminated with high levels of arsenic. Used for drinking and other essential services, the untreated water could cause serious health problems. The project was funded by the Environmental Protection Agency and the tribe to address the arsenic contamination. The project includes a pump, which pushes water through pipes.

Ryan Kellman/NPR

"The left imposed a radical climate agenda and declared war on American energy, which shut down beautiful, clean coal plants and forced communities across the country to depend on unreliable, 'green' energy sources," she wrote.

In addition to the plans to provide solar panels and battery storage, the tribe was counting on tax credits from the IRA to help build an 8-megawatt microgrid – enough electricity to operate the entire reservation – and provide jobs and economic benefits to the Hopi Tribe.

Nuvangyaoma also has aspirations to build out a large-scale solar project – 400 megawatts – with battery storage that could turn the Hopi into a major player as an energy service provider for northeast Arizona.

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The Hopi were banking on tax credits to cover upward of half the cost of the project, which is not cheap, says Thomas, of the law firm Quarles & Brady.

No one's going to write anybody a check for \$900 million," Thomas says. "No bank is gonna do it. So what the tax credits have done in the past is, they've served as capital into the project."

Now, commercial-scale utility renewable energy projects will be even harder to develop, because they're so expensive and require a longer build-out.

Trump's One Big Beautiful Bill Act doesn't just damage the Hopi's renewable energy dreams, says Thomas.

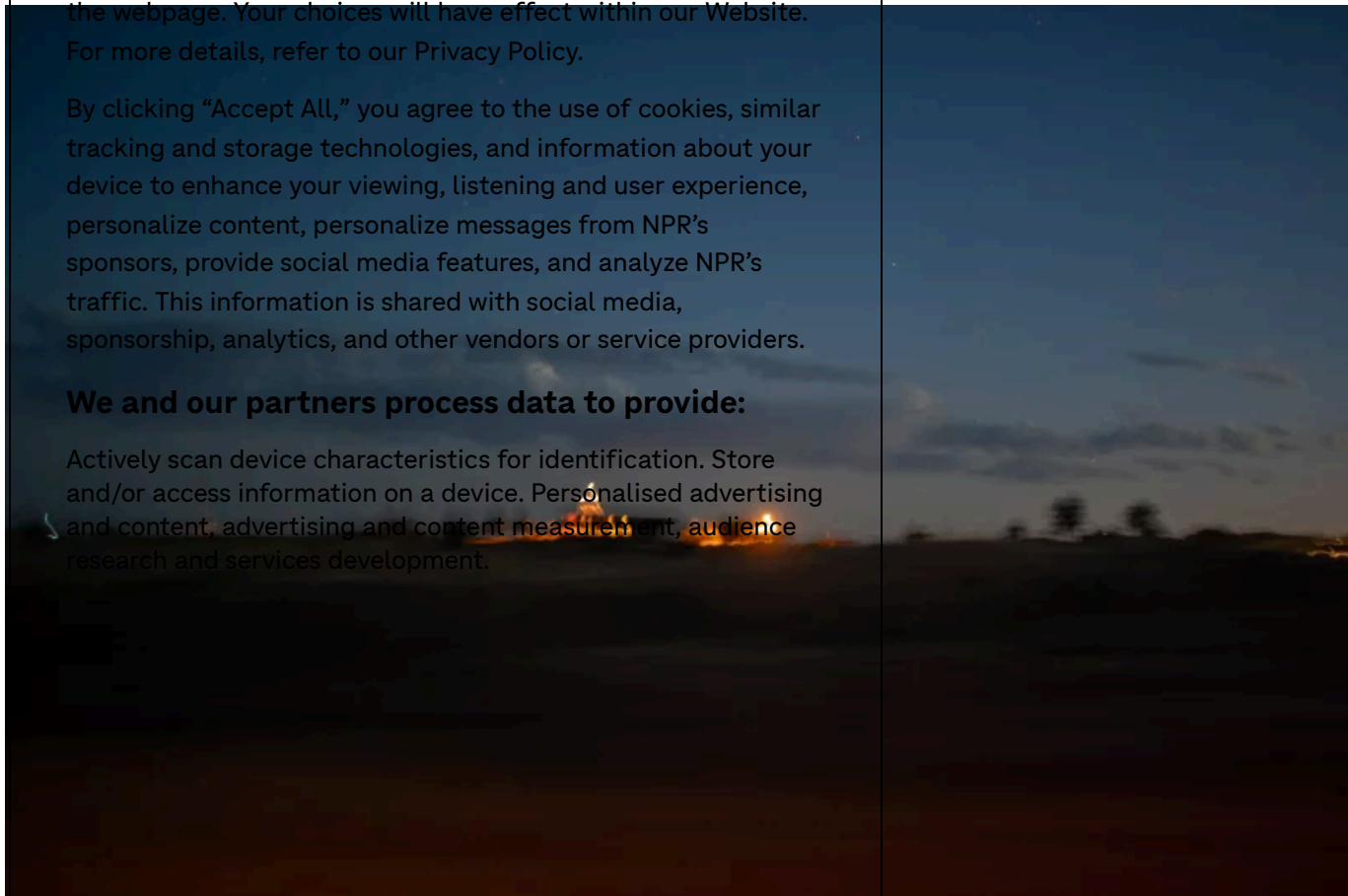
"It's not that it's gonna kill their project, 'cause it's gonna kill every project," says Thomas, who's also a member of the Pascua Yaqui Tribe in Arizona.

Johnson, the former director of the Office of Indian Energy Policy and Programs, says there's probably a lot of confusion among tribes about what funding is still available.

"Eliminating these clean energy programs within the IRA isn't just bad policy," says John... **Cookie Consent & Sponsorship Choices**... government's trust, responsibility to tribes."

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"We have a heck of a plan," Nuvangyaoma says. "I refuse to let that sit on the shelf and collect dust."



Nearly 900 homes, with close to 3,000 tribal members, do not have power on the Hopi Reservation. Those tribal members have had to rely on generators to keep refrigerated food cold and water and medical devices running. For

tribal members with access to electricity, they find that it's incredibly unstable, because if there's an issue anywhere along the 30-mile power line that runs through the reservation, everybody loses power and those outages can sometimes last days.

Ryan Kellman/NPR

climate change solar panels renewable energy hopi tribe

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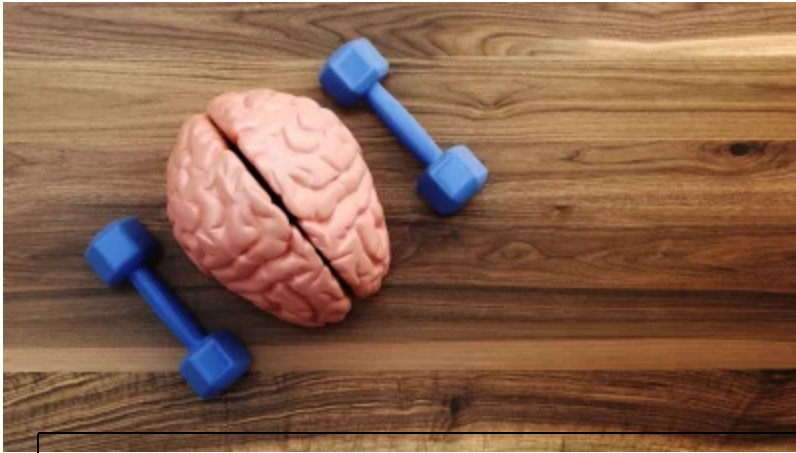
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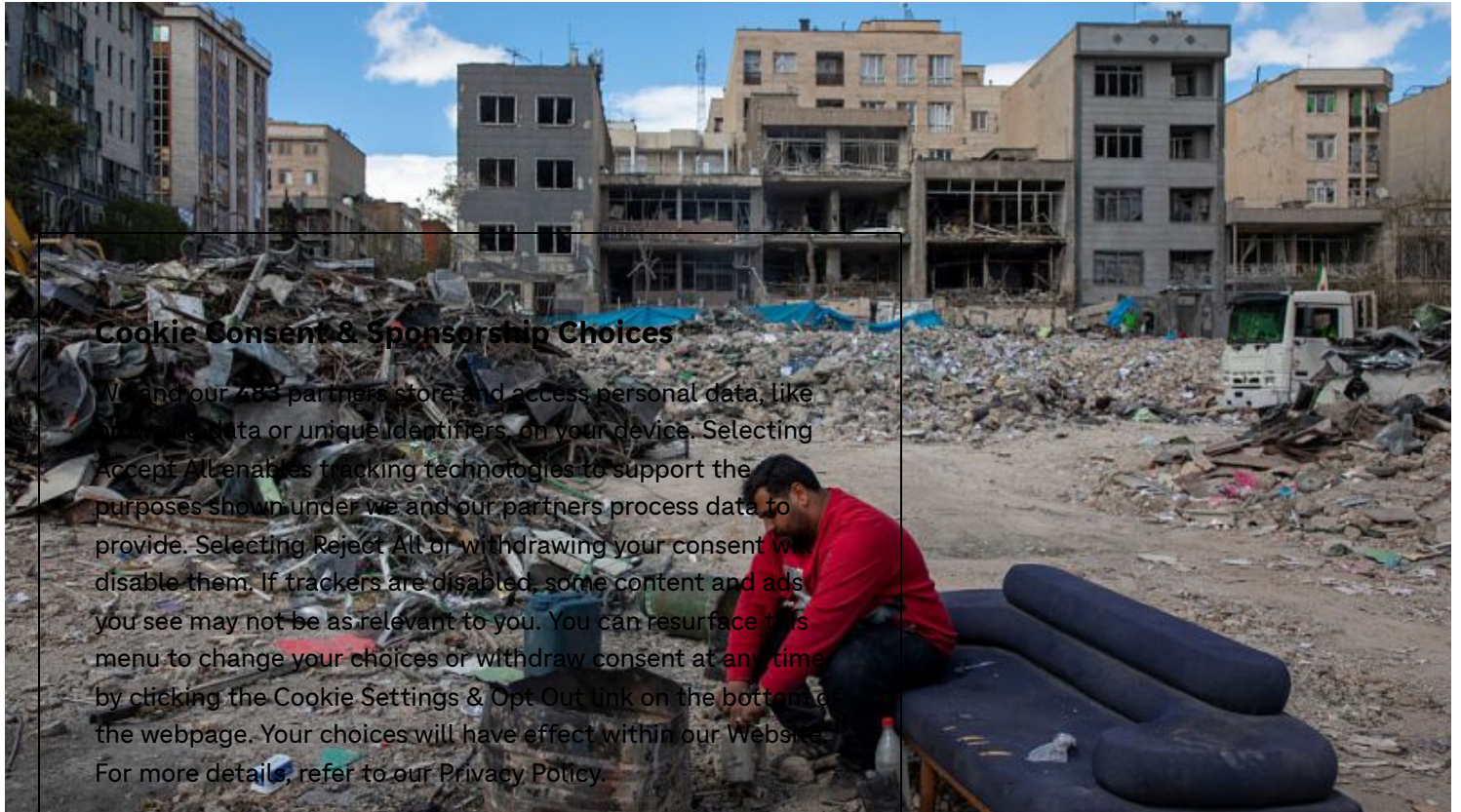
Trump shared a racist "joke." That humor is an American tradition : Code Switch

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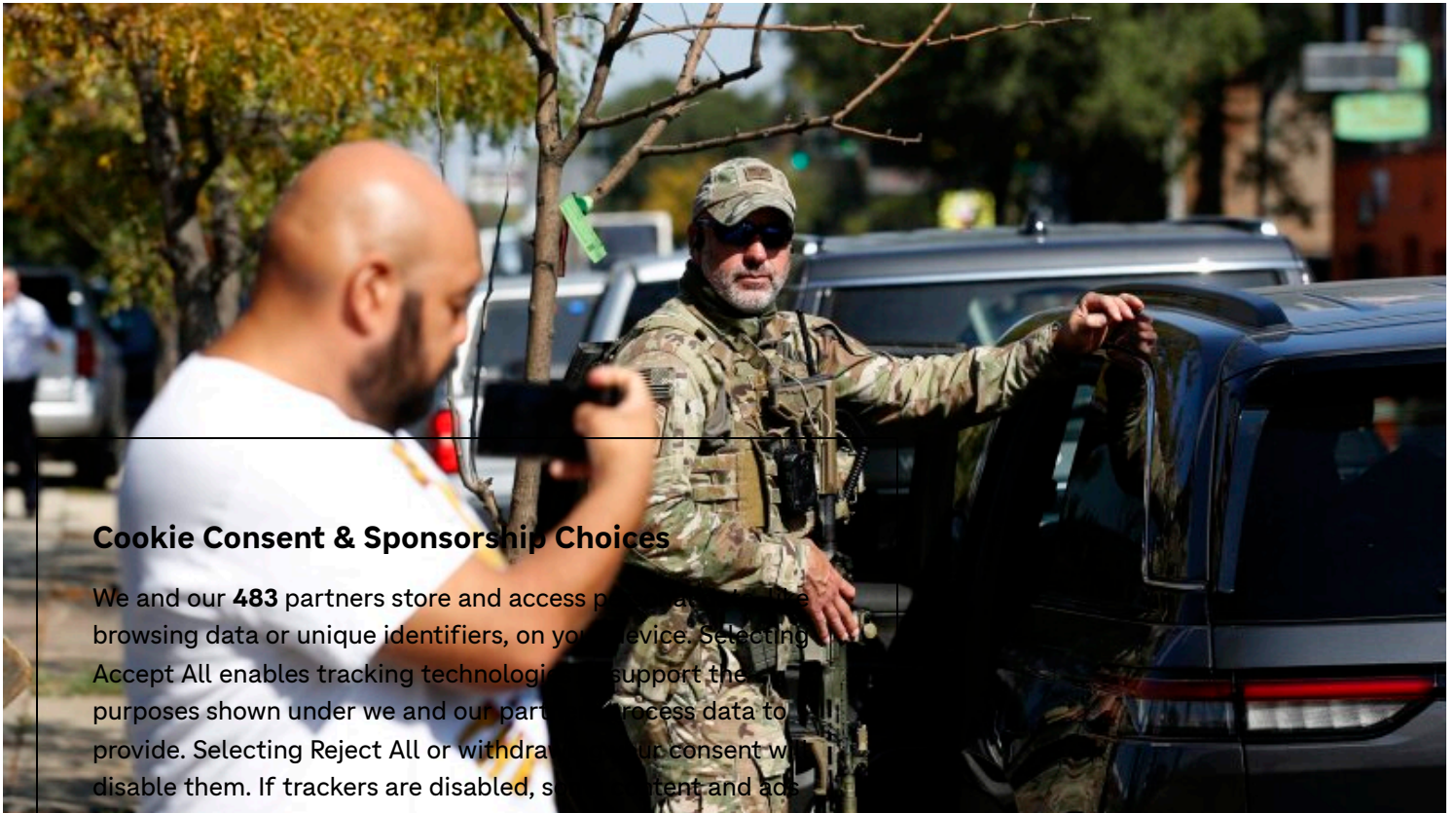
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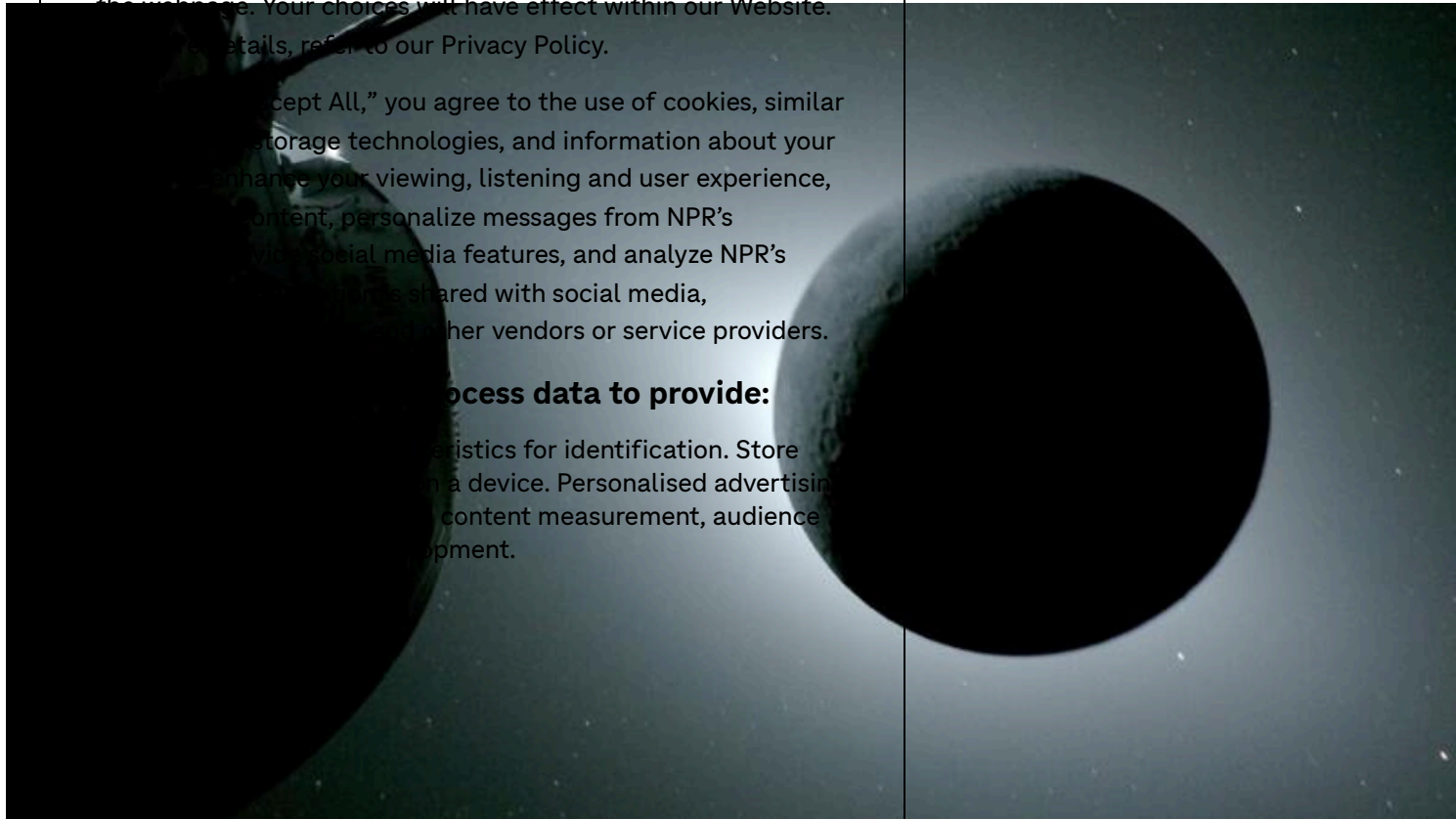
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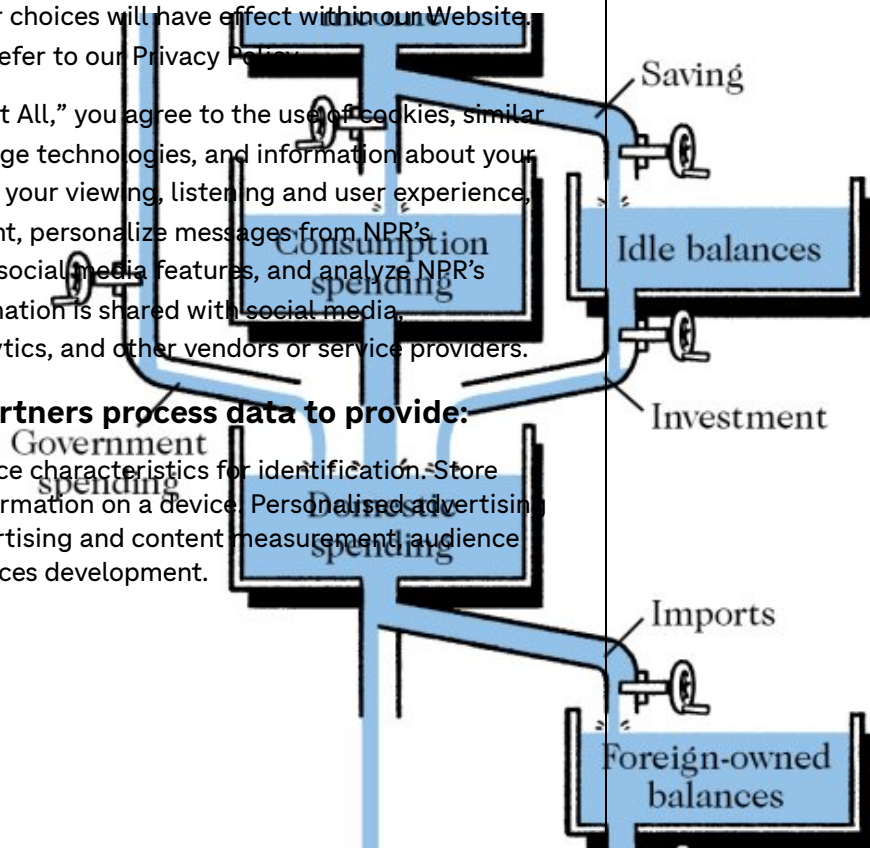
**Photos: NASA releases first images from moon flyby**

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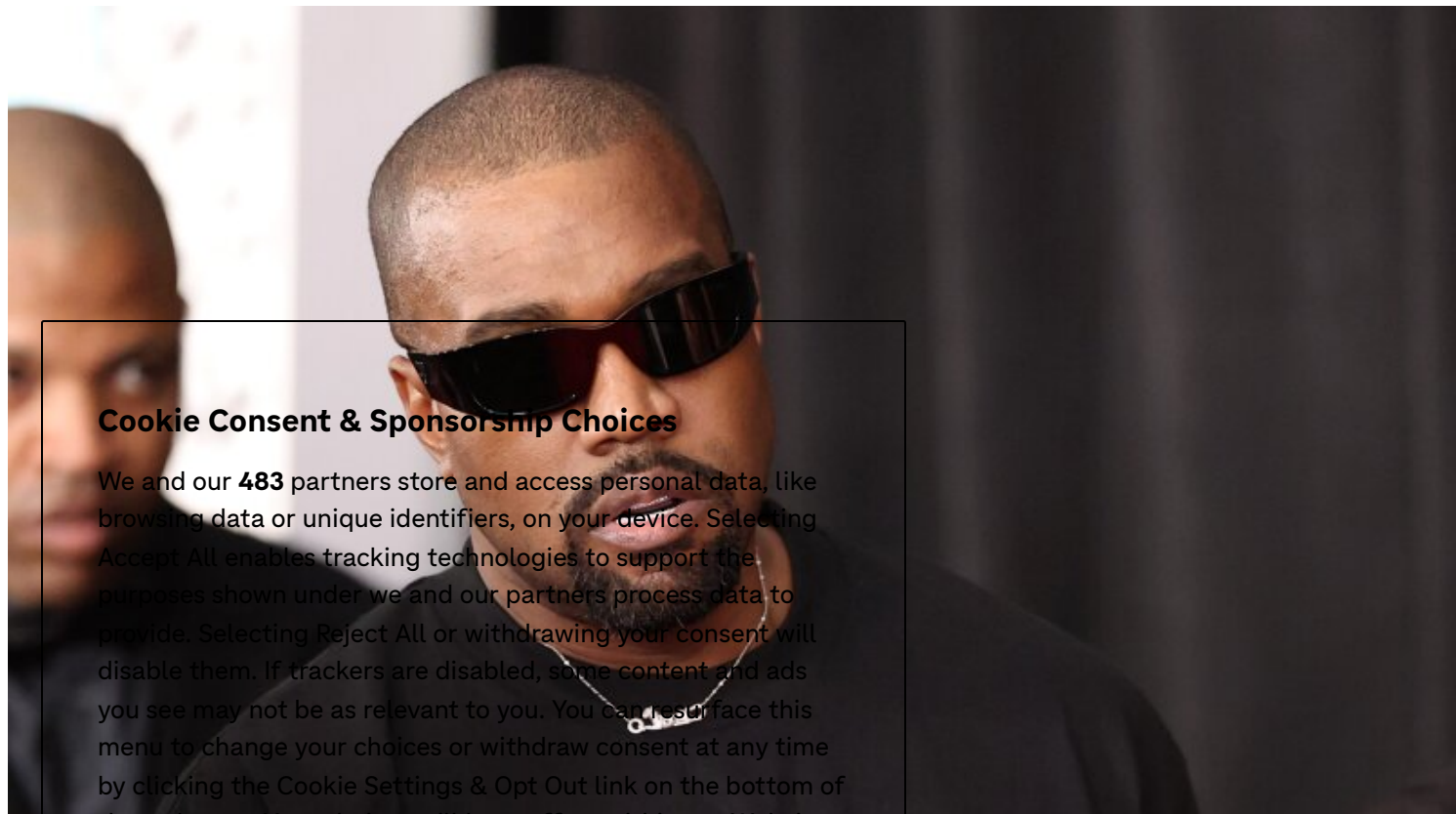
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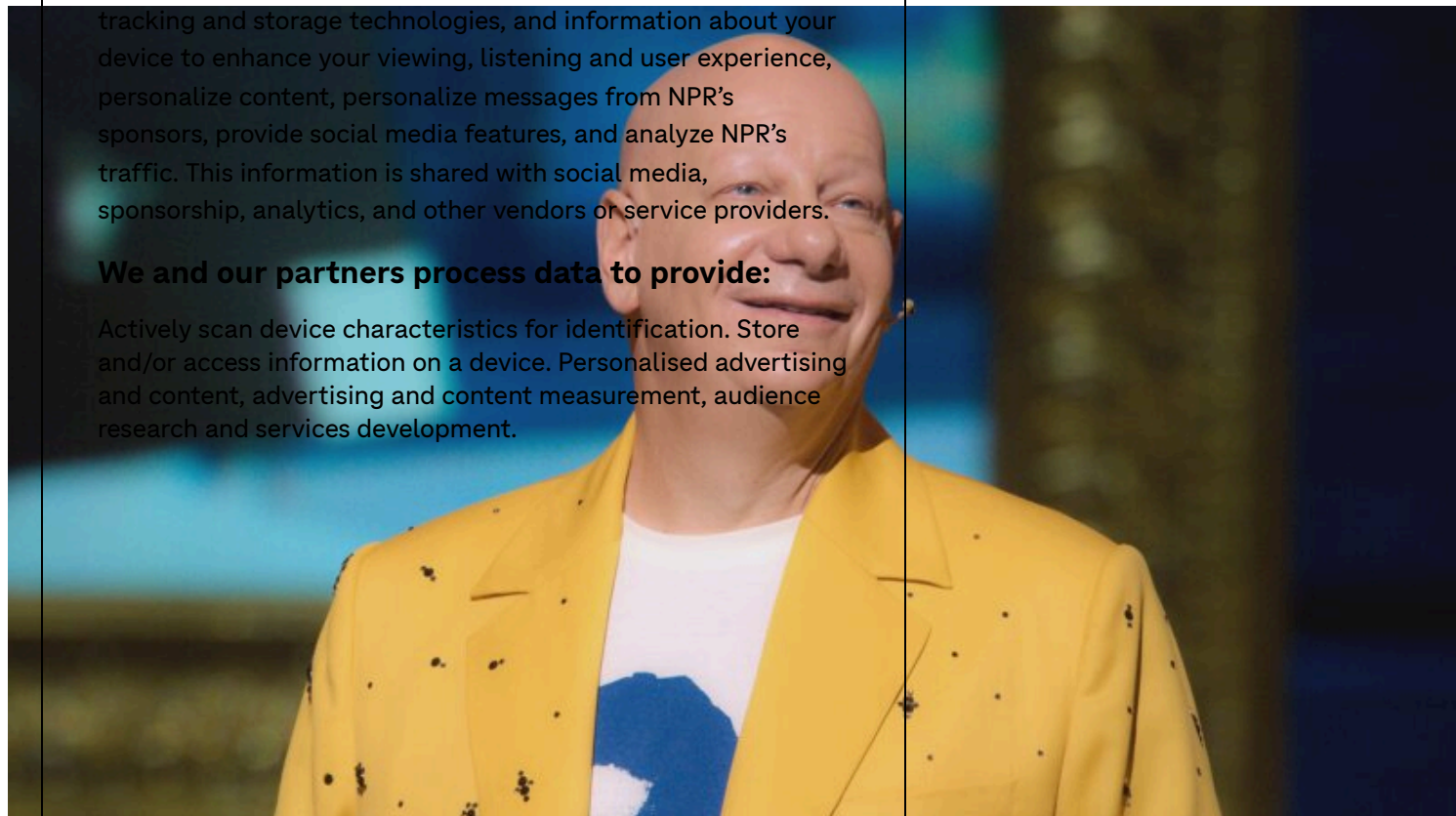
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TELEVISION

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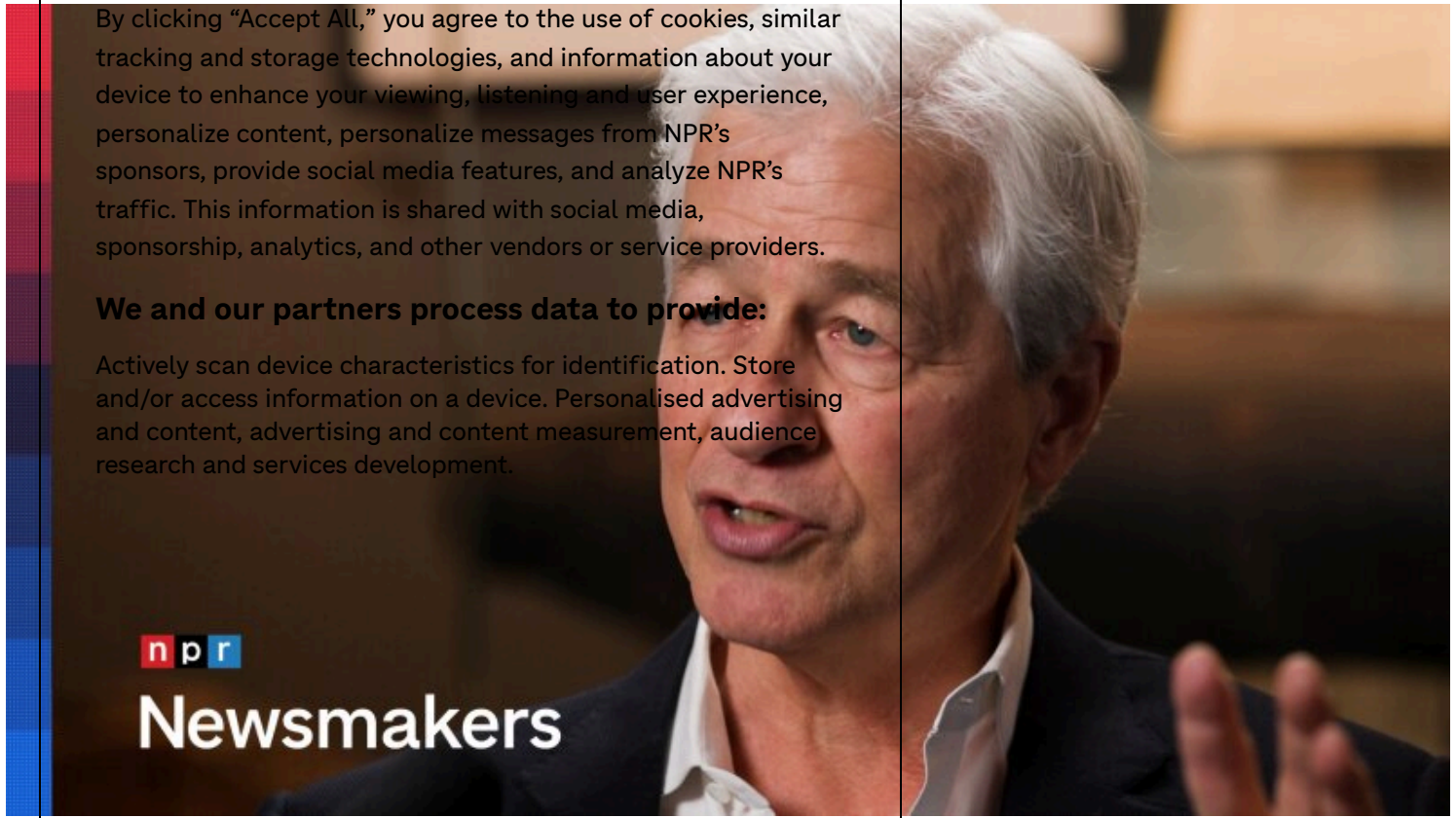
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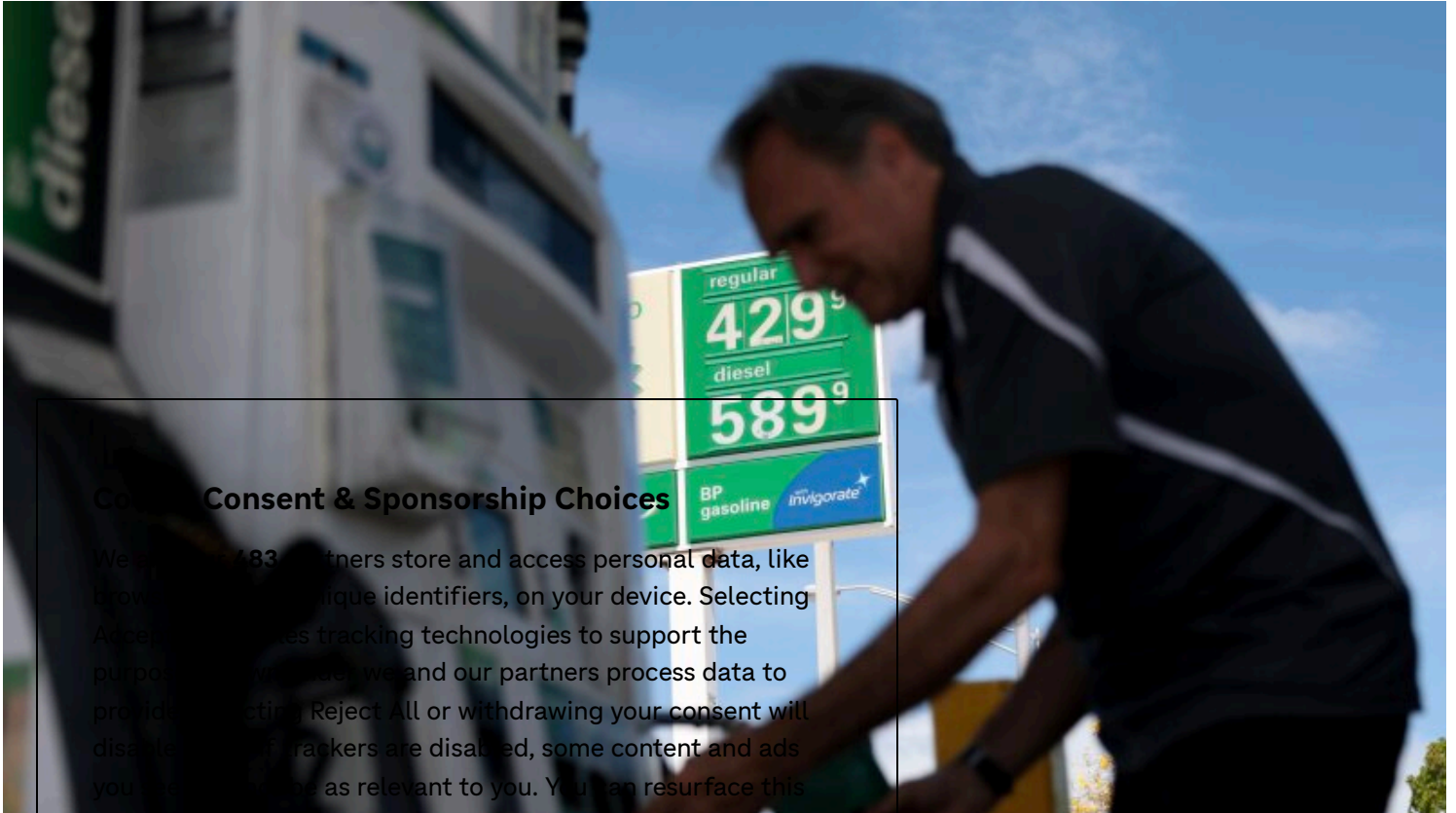
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