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POLITICS

# Federal agencies plan for mass layoffs as Trump's workforce cuts continue

UPDATED MARCH 15, 2025 · 9:18 AM ET


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 Stephen Fowler

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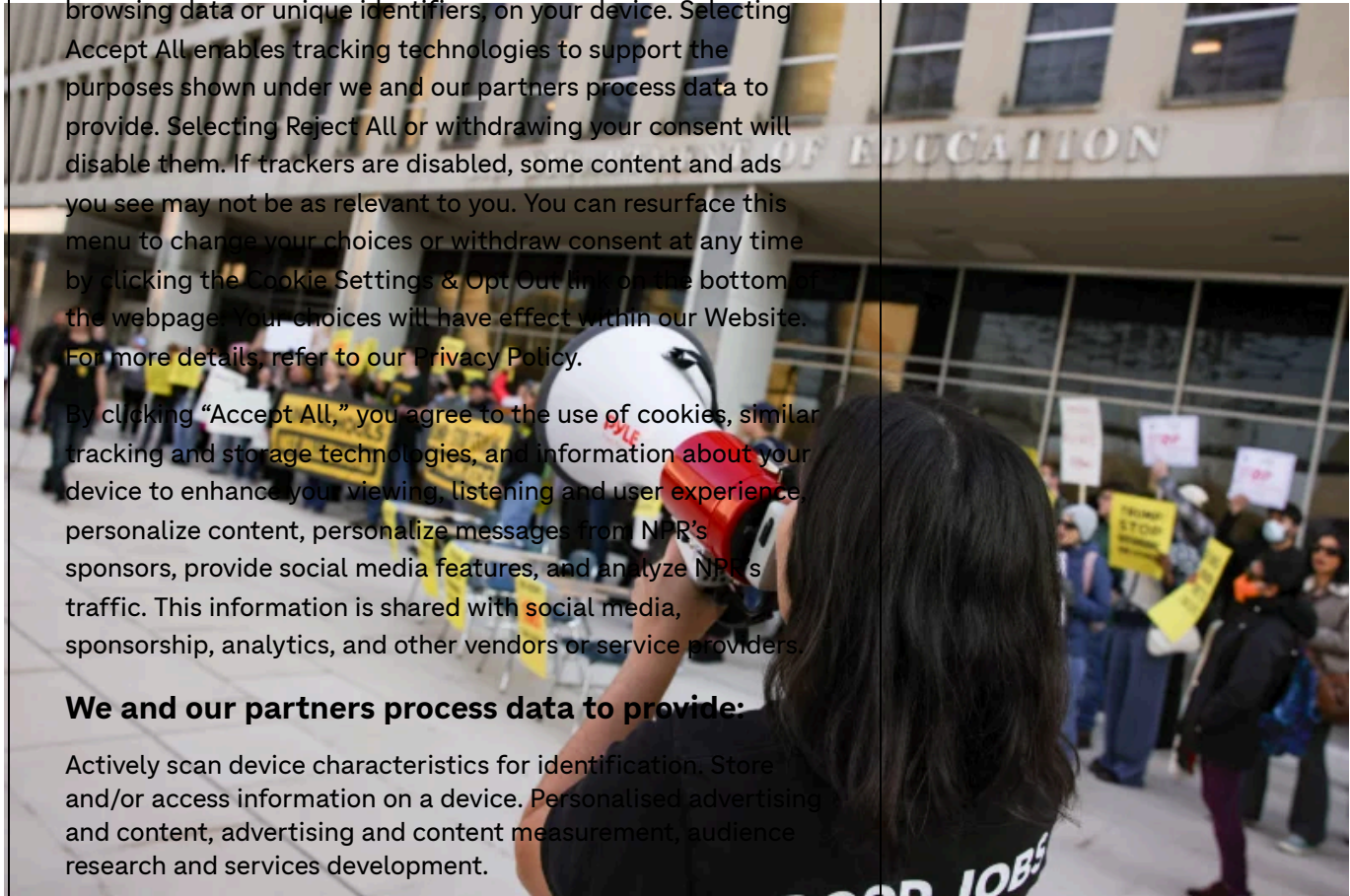
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Demonstrators gather outside the U.S. Department of Education in Washington, D.C., on Thursday to protest against planned mass layoffs at the agency.

Bryan Dozier/EPA via Getty Images

Federal agencies have begun to announce plans to implement President Trump's request for large-scale job cuts and the elimination of government functions.



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Already, the Department of Education is moving forward with a proposal to get rid of nearly half its workforce, the Department of Veterans Affairs is targeting a reduction of 80,000 employees and the Social Security Administration has offered voluntary buyouts ahead of a reduction in force.

The outlined changes are in service of Trump's vision of drastically reducing the size and scope of the federal government – an effort that has been led so far by Elon Musk and his Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE).

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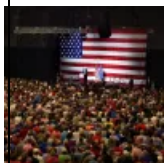
Tens of thousands of employees on probationary status – typically those new to government or who have recently started in a new role – have been fired, though these terminations have been challenged in court and the administration has been ordered to stop sweeping job cuts. We and our partners process data to provide:

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But the firings of probationary workers, DOGE's cuts and a broad hiring freeze are just initial elements of an effort to stop spending on people and programs that the president does not want to be part of the future of the federal government.

In the coming months, agencies are directed to continue restructuring their programs and personnel, canceling contracts and consolidating government buildings – while also increasing productivity and delivering "better service for the American people."

Here's what to know about the restructuring plans:

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**What are agencies supposed to do?**

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Federal agency plans, according to the memo, should focus on identifying "statutorily mandated" functions and seek to achieve five things:

1. Better service for the American people;

2. Increased productivity;

3. A significant reduction in the number of full-time equivalent (FTE) positions

by eliminating positions that are not required;

4. A reduced real property footprint; and

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5. Reduced budget topline.

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Agencies were also encouraged to cut back on layers of management and the use of consultants and contractors, and to consider consolidating field offices.

As NPR has previously reported, the General Services Administration and DOGE made plans to shed up to 25% of the government's 360 million square feet of real estate, including closing Social Security buildings, IRS taxpayer assistance centers and Bureau of Indian Affairs offices across the United States.

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We and our **483** partners store and access personal data, like browsing data or unique identifiers, on your device. Selecting **Accept All** enables tracking technologies to support the purposes of our media features and analytics. **DOGE's effort to slash government is now coming for buildings and people who run them**

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Agencies were supposed to submit initial reorganization proposals by Thursday, as well as timelines for implementing each part of their plans to eliminate positions and functions.

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**We and our partners process data to provide:** On Thursday, both federal judges who reinstated fired workers emphasized that the government has the right to reduce its workforce, but it has to follow the law in doing so.

The first step in a RIF is identifying positions and areas that may be affected, which OPM in this case says should have been done by Thursday.

From there, agencies are supposed to consider other strategies, like voluntary early retirement authority (VERA) and voluntary separation incentive payment (VSIP), to find employees who choose to leave, before a RIF takes place.

VERA allows agencies to temporarily lower age or years-of-service thresholds to qualify for retirement, while VSIP is a buyout of up to \$25,000 for employees who choose to leave.



**POLITICS**

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For agencies that move forward with a RIF, they may need to notify unions or Congress, and then they must draft official notices to send to affected employees.

These notices must include certain information like the reasons for the RIF and the effective date.

Employees must be given 60 days notice of their end date, unless OPM grants a waiver to shorten that period to 30 days.

**What cuts do we know about so far?**

Certain agencies have been targeted early by the Trump administration for dismantling. Some have been revealing details about their reorganization plans in broad public pronouncements; others have been obtained by NPR. Some plans will affect tens of thousands of employees; others are smaller, so far.

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Here's some of what's known, as of Friday afternoon:

– The **U.S. Agency for International Development** has been effectively shuttered by the DOGE initiative, and Trump officials said most of its contracts have been canceled.

– The **Education Department** will cut nearly 50% of its staff. More than 1,300 positions will be eliminated through the RIF – plus about 600 people took the "Fork" deferred resignation offer or the department's VSIP offer. Affected employees will be placed on administrative leave starting March 21 and will receive full pay and benefits until June 9, 90 days after the department announced its RIF plans.

– The **VA** aims to return to our 2019 end-strength numbers of 399,957 employees, according to an internal memo obtained by NPR, which would be a reduction of roughly 80,000 employees. A specific RIF plan will be developed soon, the memo says.

– A **Defense Department** memo, obtained by NPR this week, calls for the elimination of probationary positions that are "non-mission critical" in an effort to reduce the civilian workforce by 5% to 8%, targeting at least 55,000 jobs. The Pentagon has some 780,000 civilian employees.

The memo says it will start by seeking job cuts through early retirement and voluntary separations, which must be fully realized by June." Managers are expected to provide their plans no later than March 20.

– The **Social Security Administration** announced Feb. 28 that it would aim to slash 7,000 jobs.

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– In recent weeks, the **General Services Administration's** Public Buildings Service has fired more than 1,000 permanent and probationary employees and has sent RIF notices to eliminate nearly the entire staff in three of 11 regions across the country.

– The **National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration** is planning to cut more than a thousand employees, according to information shared with NPR by a NOAA employee who was not authorized to speak publicly.

In another memo on Friday, the White House named seven additional government entities that will be affected:

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— **The Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service**, a small federal agency that provides "mediation and other conflict resolution services" to prevent work stoppages and labor disputes.

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— **The United States Agency for Global Media**, a network of broadcasting groups that spreads U.S. news and information to the rest of the world. The agency supports Voice of America, Radio Free Europe, Radio Free Asia, and others.

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— **The Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in the Smithsonian Institution**, a think tank that offers nonpartisan analysis and research on national and global affairs.

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— **The Institute of Museum and Library Services**, which supports libraries, archives and museums across the country, largely through grant or funding opportunities.

— **The United States Interagency Council on Homelessness**, a federal agency whose sole mission is to end homelessness in the U.S. It is responsible for coordinating with other federal agencies to develop and implement a national response against homelessness.

— **The Community Development Financial Institutions Fund**, a bipartisan initiative established in 1994 to bolster investment in underserved or low-income communities.

– **The Minority Business Development Agency**, which focuses on helping minority business through programs and advocacy.

### What comes next?

As agencies move forward with eliminating positions, they must submit another set of plans by April 14 outlining a "positive vision for more productive, efficient agency operations," according to the OPM/OMB memo.

This includes proposed relocations of people and offices outside the Washington, D.C., area, changes to regulations or agency policies to help facilitate downsizing and more details about the implementation of RIFs.

For agencies that provide direct services to citizens, they must also include explanations of why the reduction in staff and resources will "have a positive effect on the delivery of such services."

Agencies will deliver monthly progress reports and are expected to wrap up the process by the end of the fiscal year, Sept. 30.

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*Have information you want to share about agency reduction-in-force plans and other changes to the federal government? Reach out to this author through encrypted communications on Signal: Stephen Fowler is at stphnfwlr.25.*

With reporting by NPR's Tom Bowman, Quil Lawrence, Shannon Bond, Jenna McLaughlin and Alejandra Borunda.

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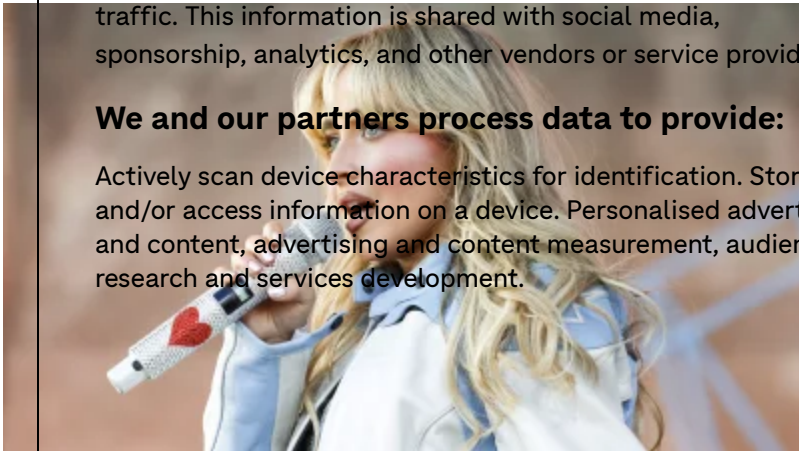
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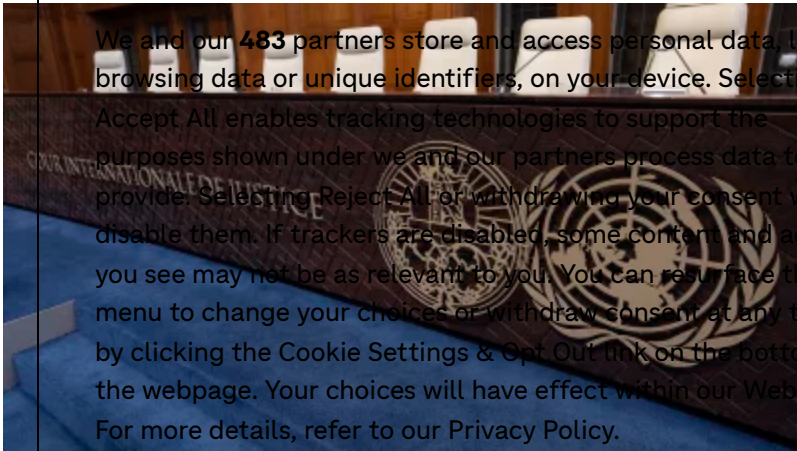
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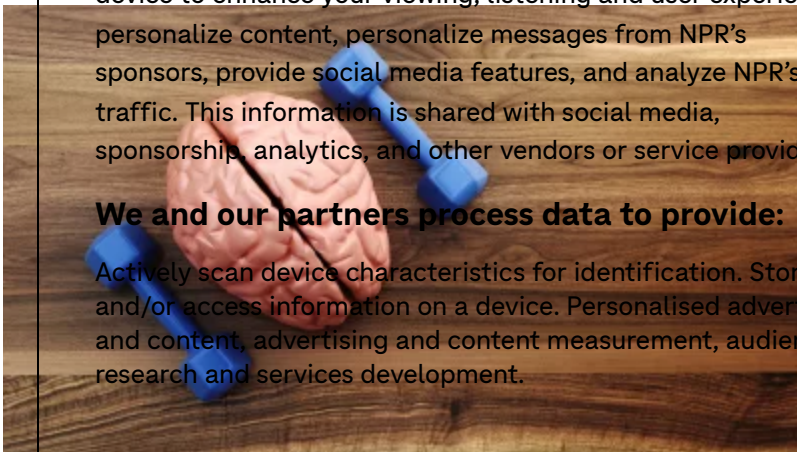
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SPACE

### What can Artemis II astronauts see that satellites haven't captured?

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CODE SWITCH

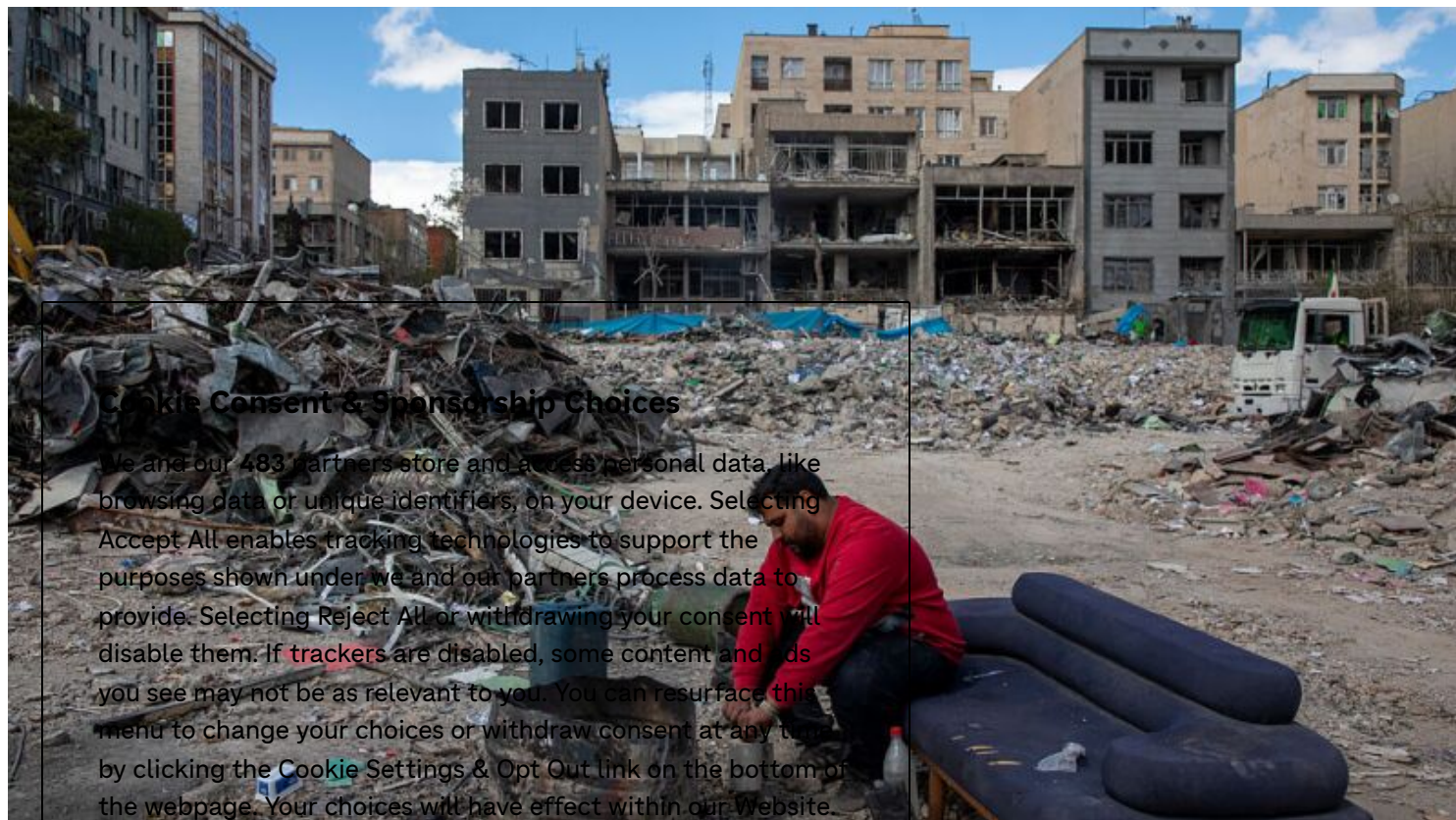
### Trump shared a racist "joke." That humor is an American tradition : Code Switch

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### U.S. and Iran agree to 2-week ceasefire, suspending Trump's threat to annihilate Iran

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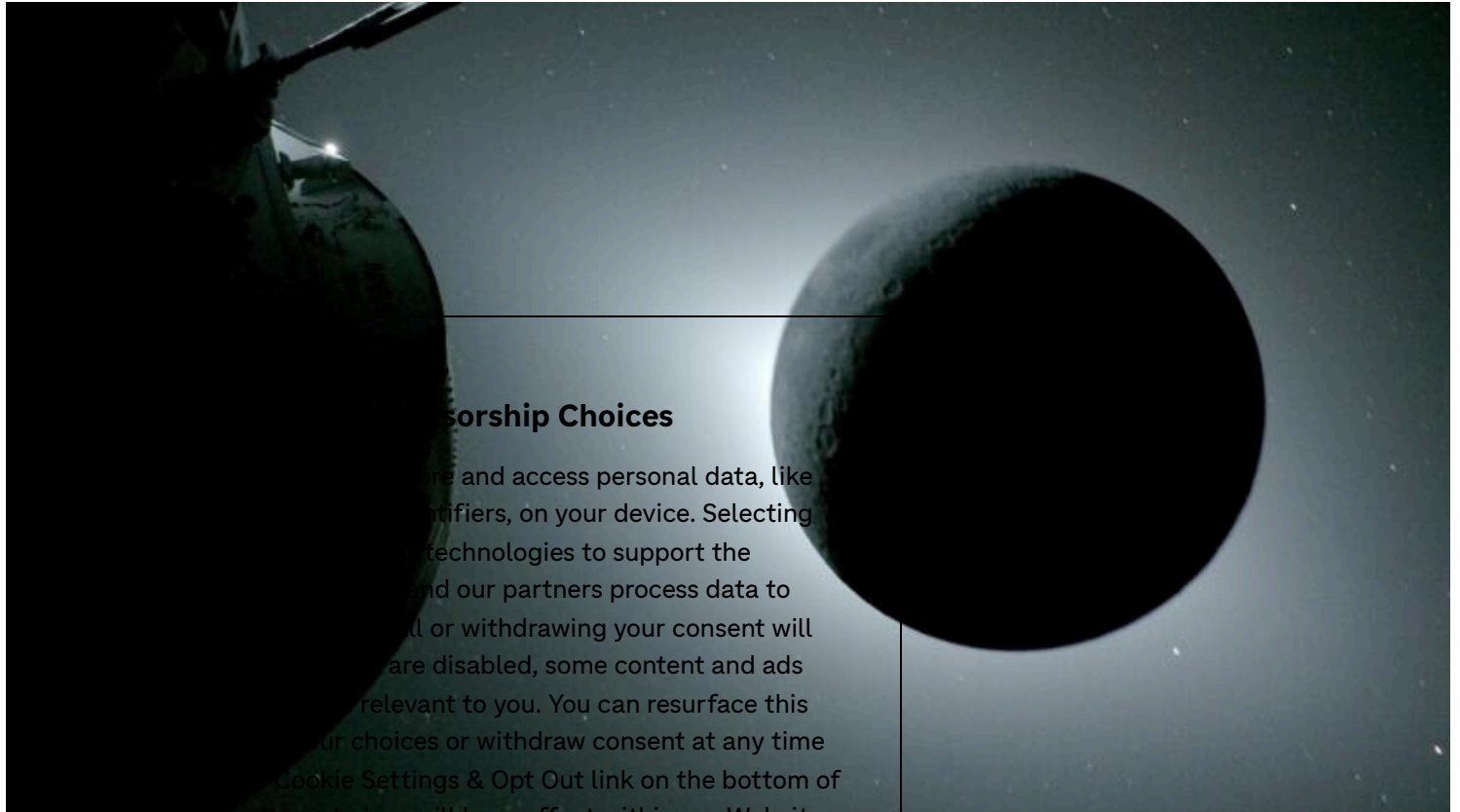
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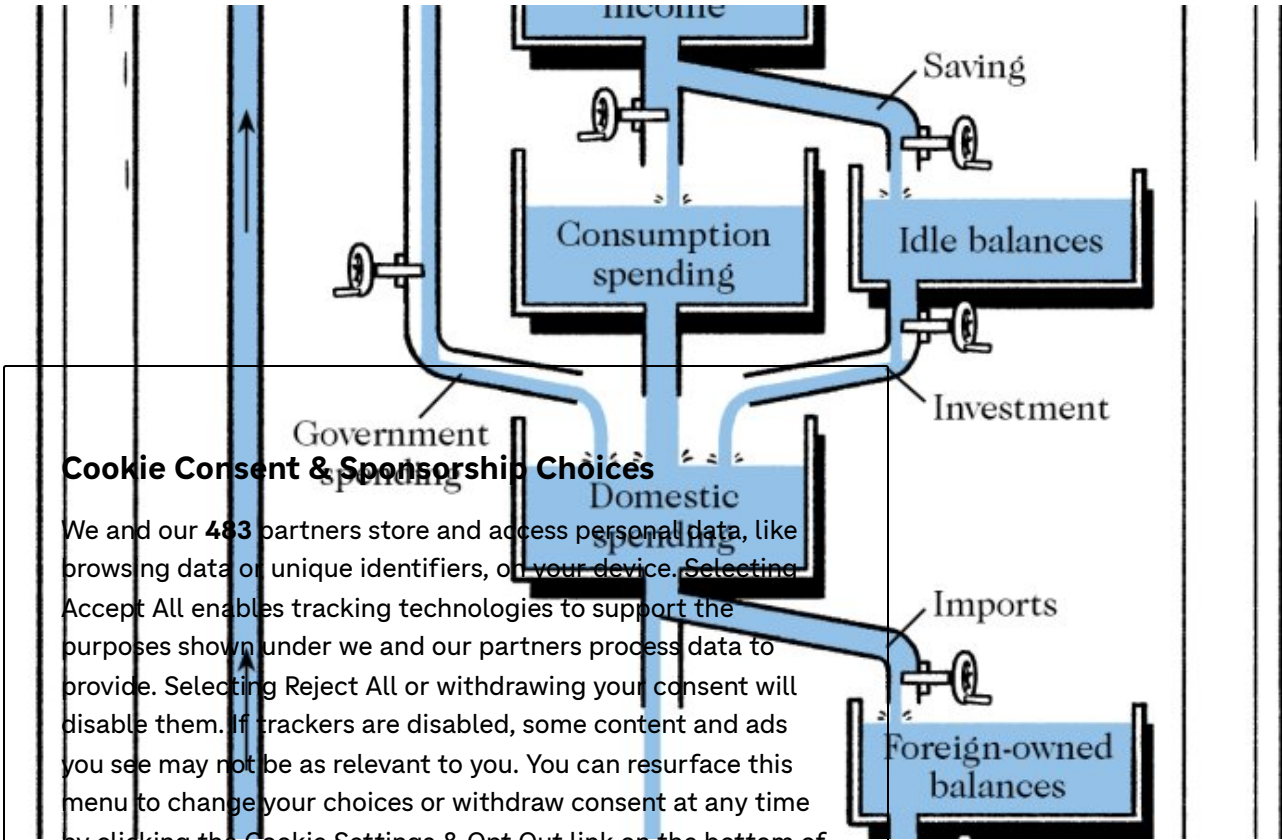
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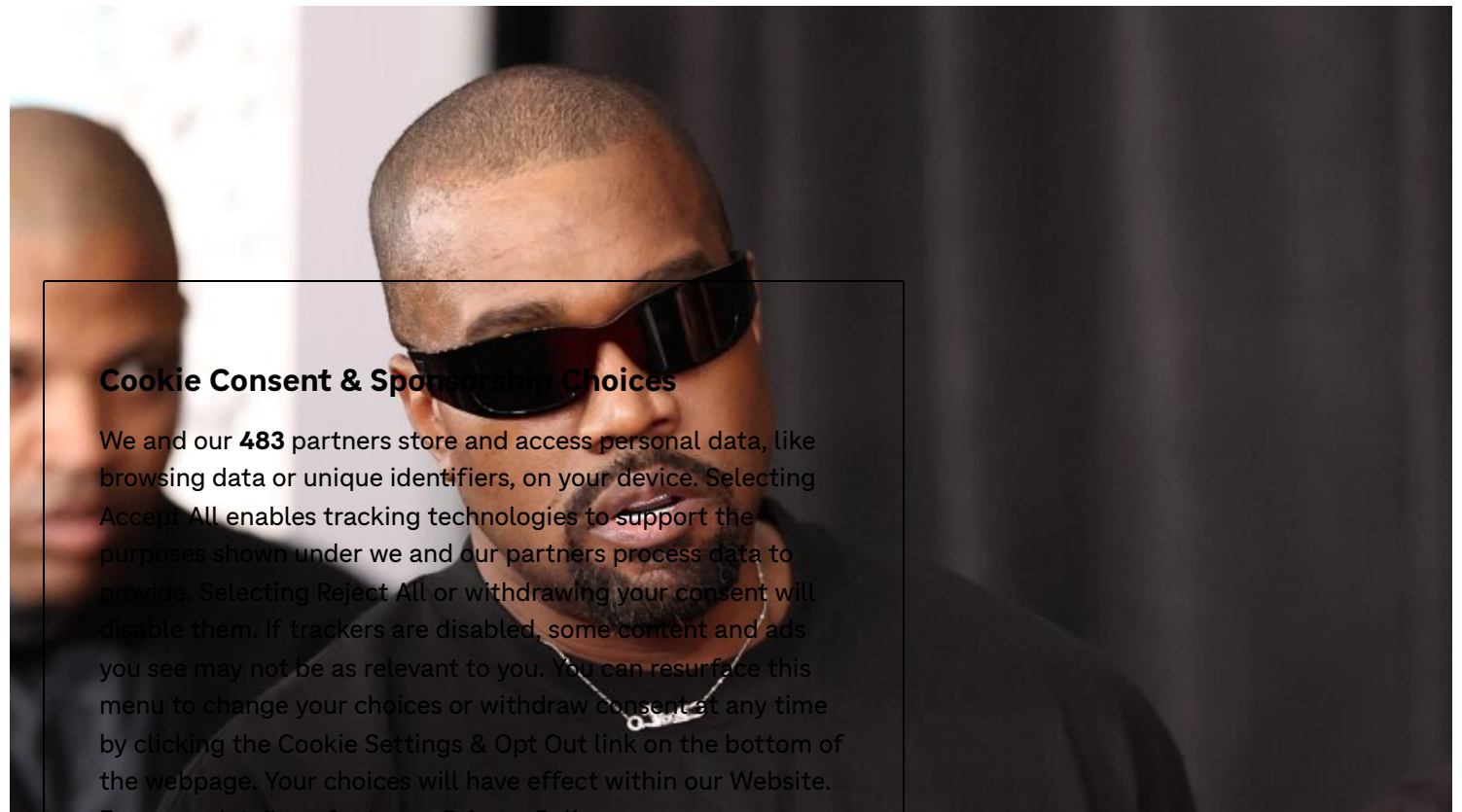
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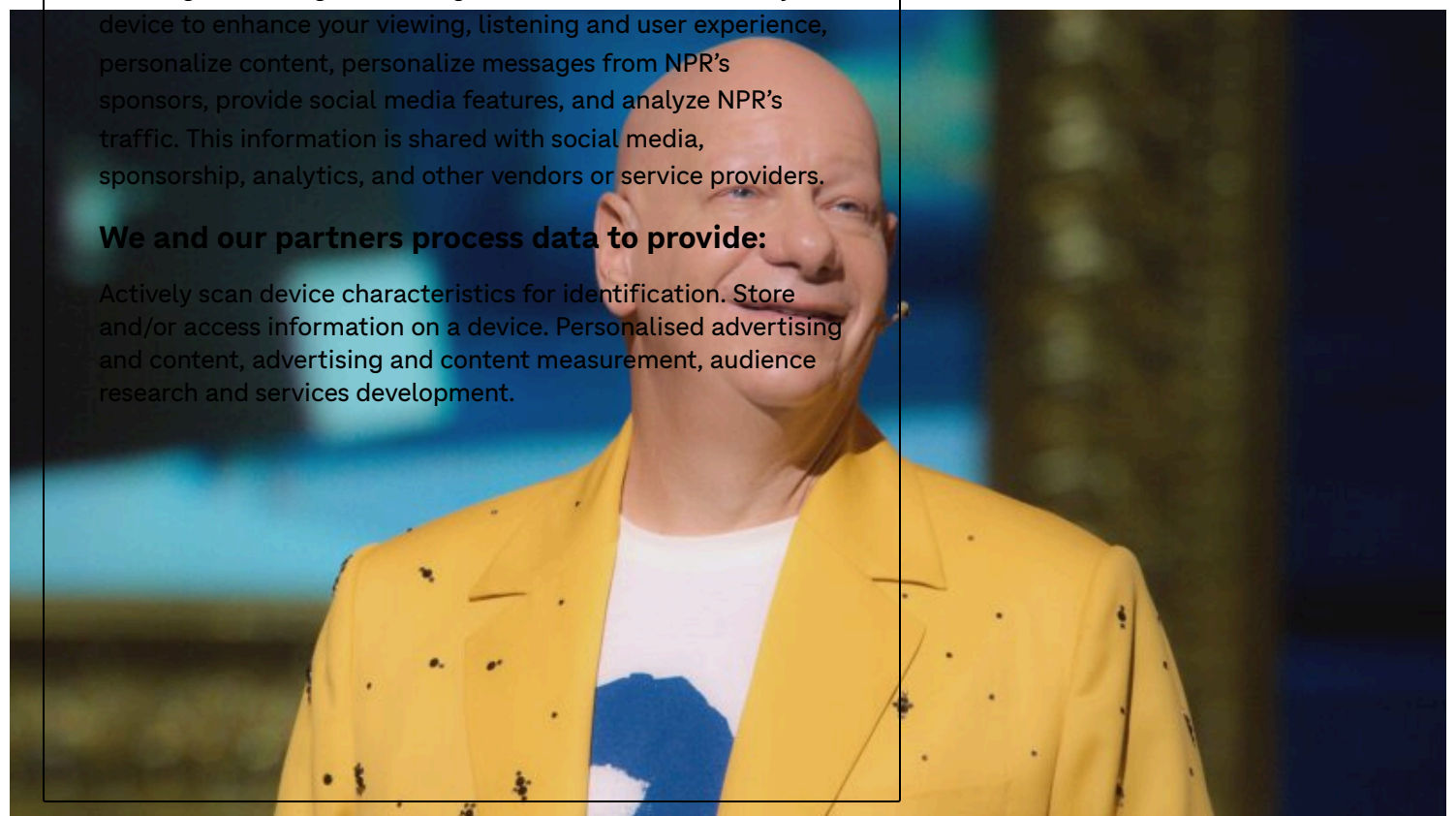
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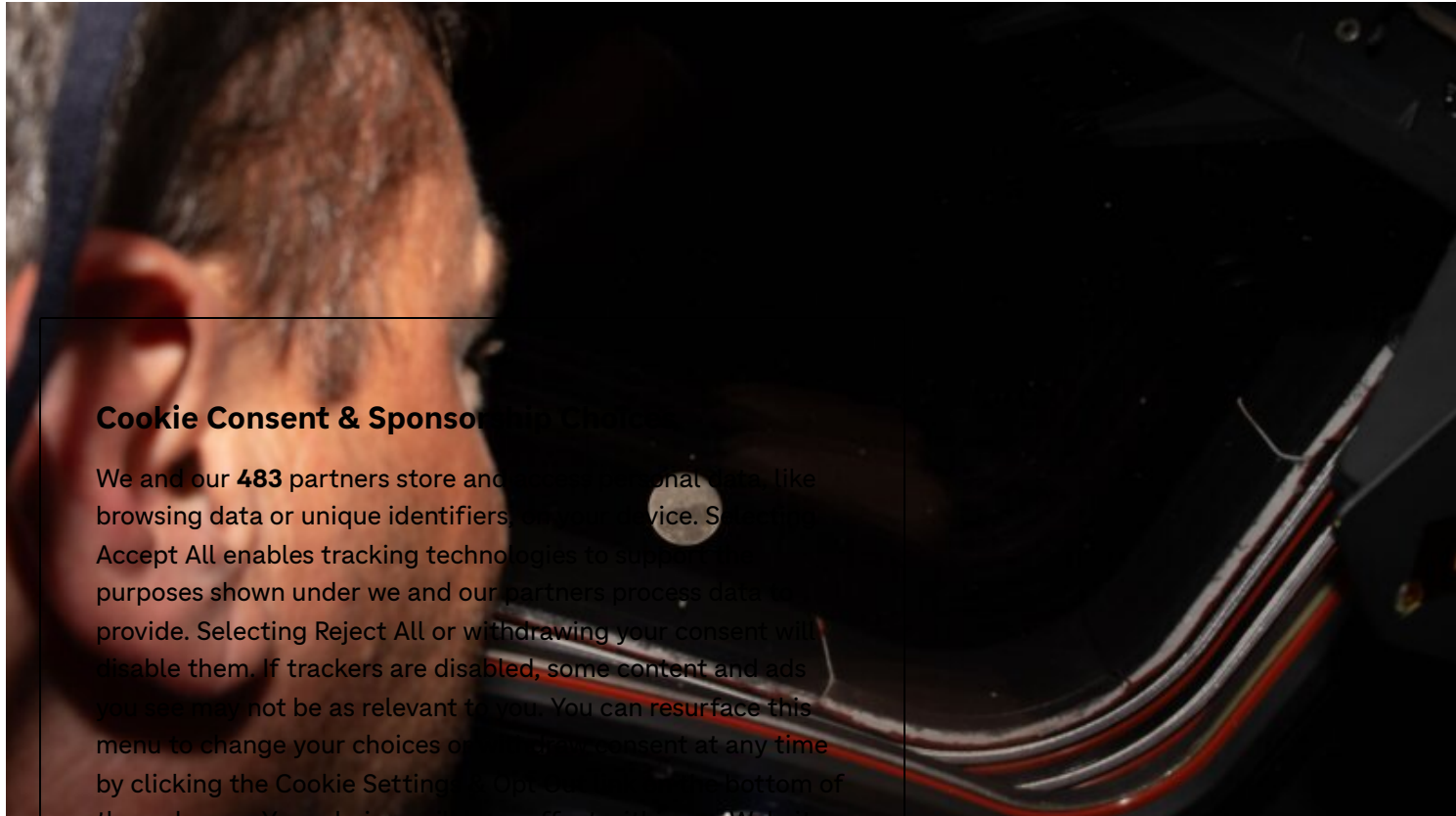
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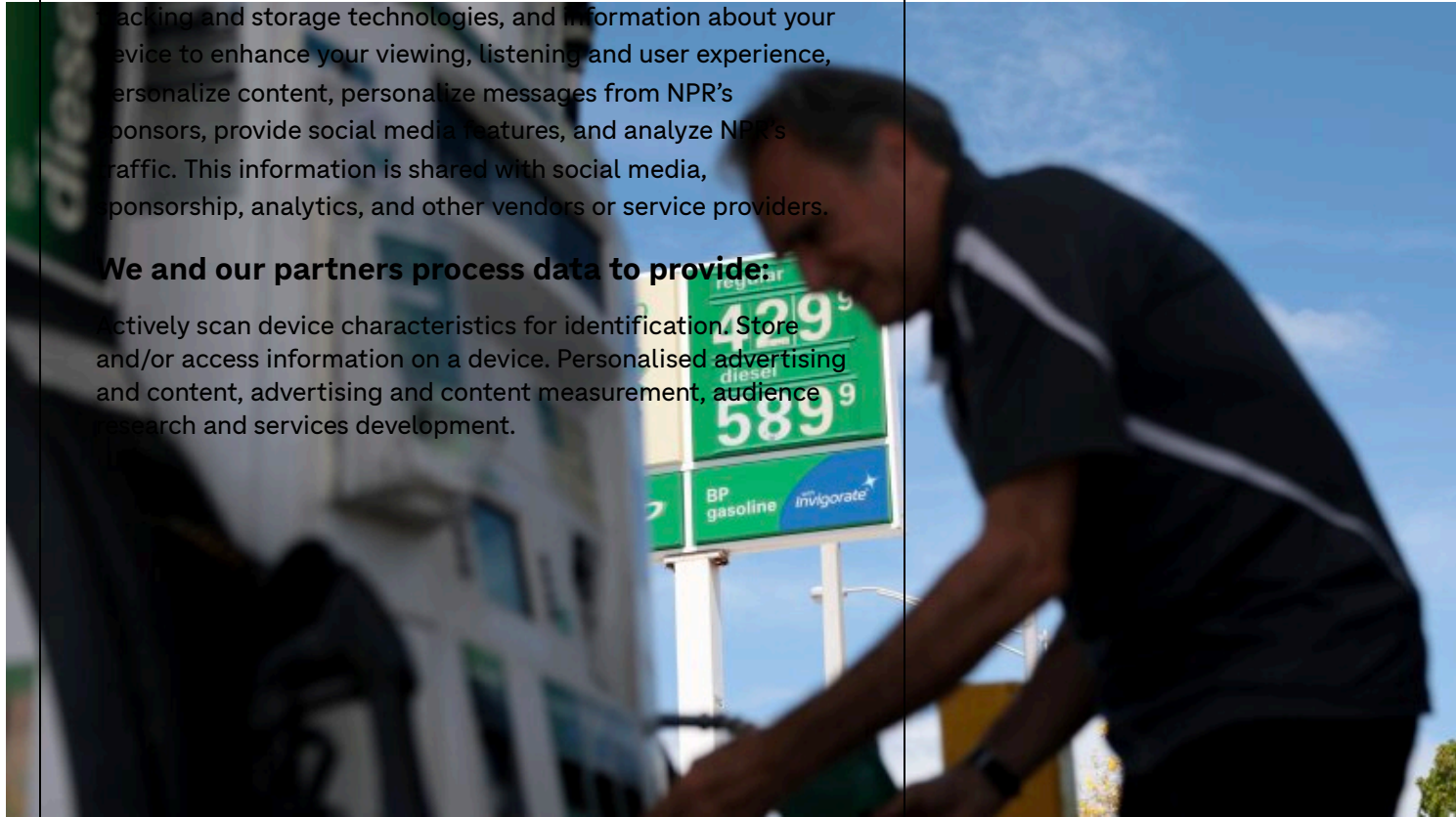
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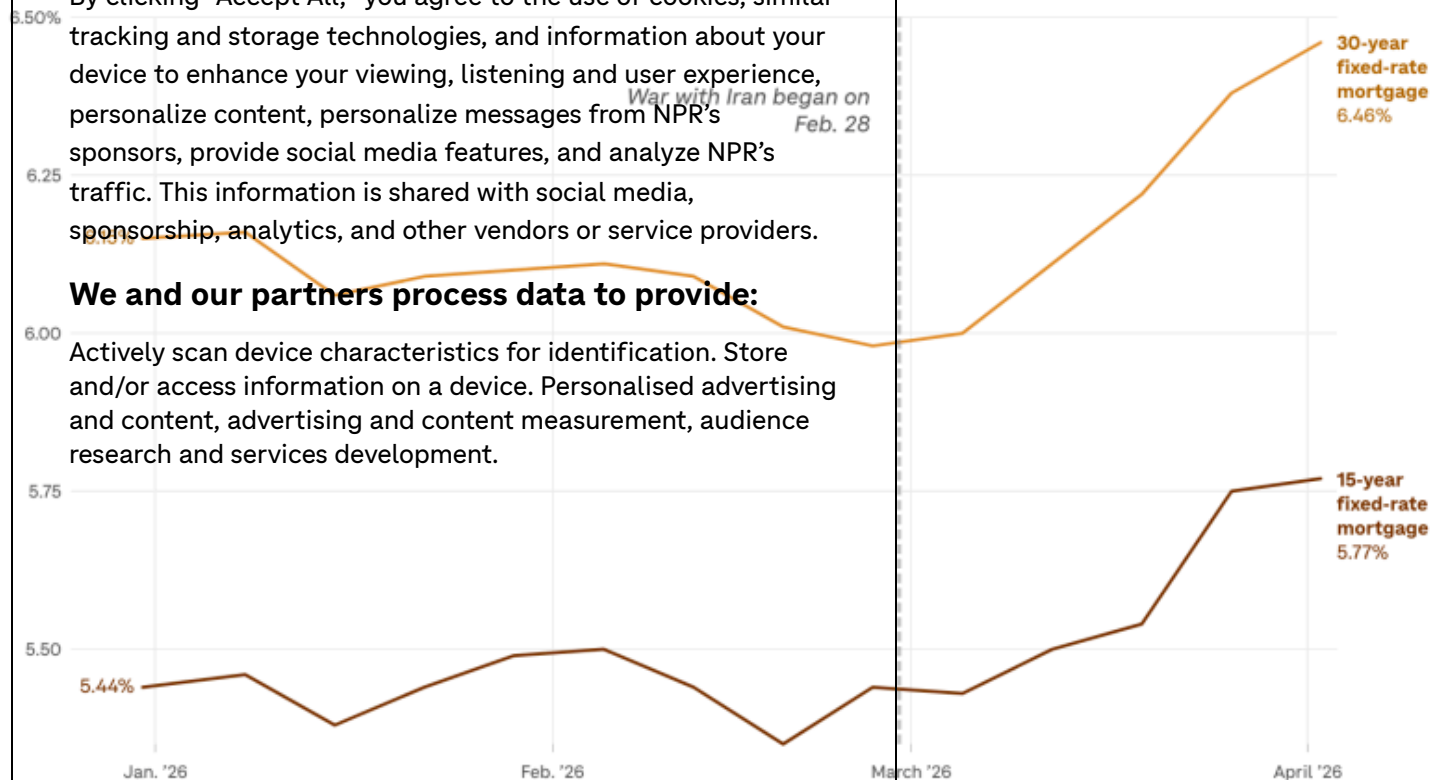
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War with Iran began on Feb. 28

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