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Immigration detention on track for deadliest fiscal year since 2004

MARCH 10, 2026 · 12:51 PM ET

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By Ximena Bustillo, Rahul Mukherjee

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 People place flowers on a fence outside Krome Detention Center in Miami in May 2025, during a vigil to recognize people who have died in U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement custody as well as those affected by mass deportations.

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 Rebecca Blackwell/AP

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It's the deadliest year for those in immigration detention in more than two decades.

More people have died in Immigration and Customs Enforcement custody since October — 23 — than died in the whole prior fiscal year.

The most recent death was of a 56-year-old Haitian man held at an immigration detention center in Arizona. He died in a hospital after going into septic shock.

The increase in deaths comes as nearly 70,000 people are in ICE detention, the highest number in several years.

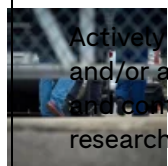
Former agency officials and immigration advocates have warned that detaining more people — coupled with reduced oversight — will increase the likelihood of

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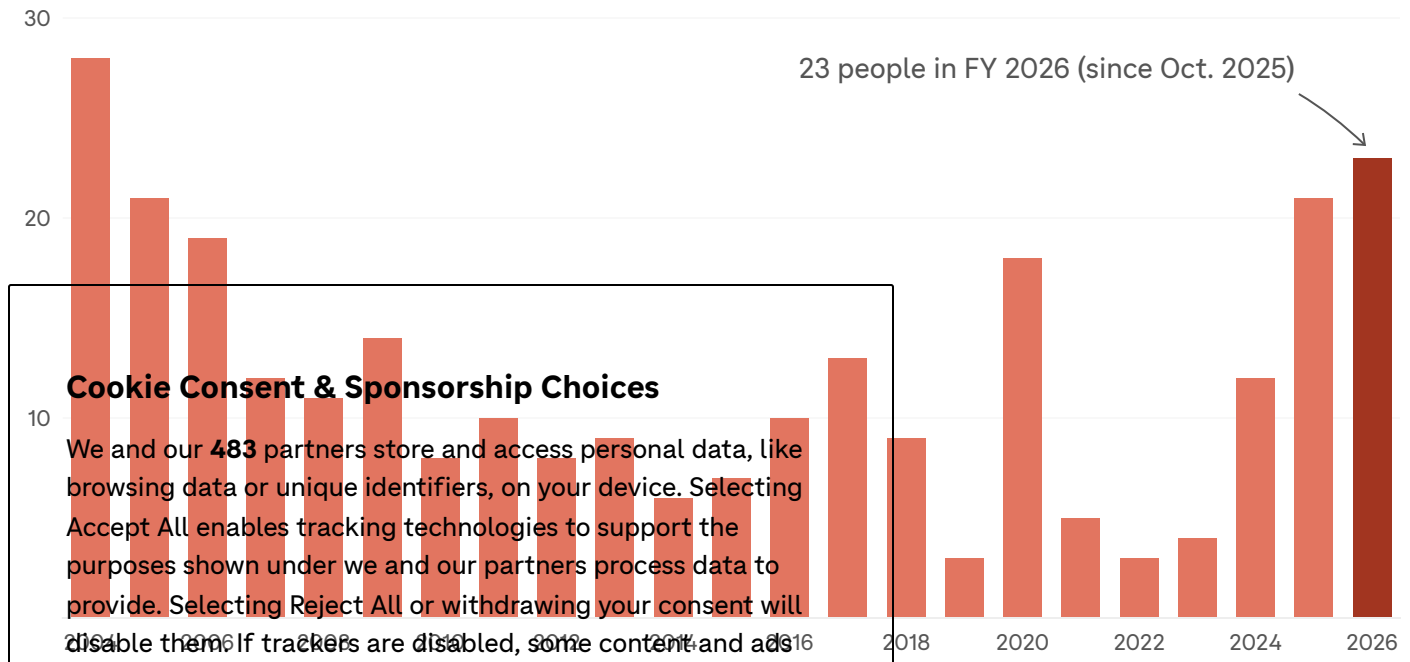
It's the deadliest year for people in ICE custody in decades; next year could be worse

"The abhorrent and worsening conditions in detention centers, gross negligence, and a complete lack of oversight have contributed to yet another grim record for deaths in ICE custody," said Jennifer Ibañez Whitlock, senior policy counsel at the National Immigration Law Center, an immigrant rights defense organization.

"As a country, we cannot accept that death in federal custody is an acceptable or inevitable outcome of American immigration policy."

23 people have died in ICE custody so far this fiscal year

Deaths in Immigration and Customs Enforcement facilities, by fiscal year. 2026 data is through March 10.



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The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) did not respond to a request for comment on the death count.

Democratic lawmakers have also raised questions about the increasing numbers of deaths in detention and detainees' access to health care, as well as the lag in reporting.

At no time during detention is a detained alien denied emergency care, ICE stated in a press release announcing the death of the man in Arizona.

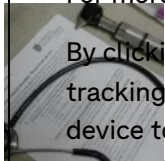
Last summer, Congress gave DHS about \$70 billion to hire more staff, including deportation and detention officers, and increase its detention space, as part of Republicans' One Big Beautiful Bill Act spending and tax package.

But rapidly scaling up immigration arrests has contributed to overcrowding, unsanitary conditions and issues with food and health care access in detention centers, according to media reports and immigration advocates.

In January, detainees had confirmed cases of measles at the Florence Detention Center in Arizona and at the Dilley Immigration Processing Center in Texas, which houses families. Another outbreak was reported this month at Camp East Montana, a facility in Texas that has also separately had three deaths.

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HEALTH

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Measles continues to spread in the US, but with some letup

The department at the time defended the steps it took after the outbreak in Florence and Dilley, including quarantining people and controlling the spread of infection.

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Steps to keep detainees healthy

Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem, whom President Trump is replacing, detailed the steps the agency takes to prevent fatalities.

"Medical treatment is provided to individuals in our processing and detention centers," she told senators. "Within 12 hours, they have a medical examination, we get them the prescriptions and medication that they need. They also have a full evaluation."

In general, the agency says detainees receive a full health assessment within 14 days of entering ICE custody or arriving at a facility, as well as getting access to medical appointments and 24-hour emergency care.

"ICE is actively recruiting healthcare professionals, including doctors, nurses, psychiatrists, pharmacists, and health administrators, to support the expanded detention capacity enabled by the historic funding provided under President Trump's One Big Beautiful Bill," a DHS spokesperson said in a statement, but declined to provide an update on the recruitment efforts.

Still, medical professionals who were assigned to work in immigration detention centers told NPR they witnessed chaotic screenings – and life-threatening delays in getting medicine and care to detainees. Overcrowded and understaffed conditions have pushed some to quit.



HEALTH Some Public Health Service officers deployed in detention centers suffer moral distress

Austin Kocher, an assistant research professor at Syracuse University studying the immigration enforcement system, said the skyrocketing detention population alone may not explain the increase in deaths.

"This is a captive population with documented concerns about care, and it's a system that's grown incredibly quickly," Kocher said. "My concern is that these deaths are preventable, not just a function of simple demographics."

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He pointed to a 2024 study from the American Civil Liberties Union and other advocacy groups that found the vast majority of the 52 deaths in immigration detention from 2017-2021 would have been prevented if people had received "clinically appropriate" medical care, such as providing access to needed medications or timely treatment.

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IMMIGRATION

Support In recorded calls, reports of overcrowding and lack of food at ICE detention centers

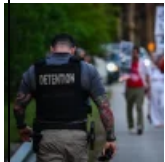
Investigating deaths in custody

The **Civil Rights and Civil Liberties Office at DHS**, the **ICE Health Services Corps** and the **Immigration Office of Detention Oversight** typically investigate any death in ICE custody.

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DHS **we and our partners process data to provide:** government shutdowns. During the 43-day full government shutdown last fall, DHS said its Office of Detention Oversight was shut. **Five people died in custody** during this time.

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IMMIGRATION

Civil rights jobs have been cut. Those ex-workers warn of ICE detention violations

DHS did not respond to questions from NPR about whether the office is working during the current shutdown of the agency, which is now in its fourth week. It instead referred questions on shutdown impacts to the **Office of Management and Budget**. **OMB did not respond.**

Recent incidents include "medical distress," struggles with officers

Medical conditions surrounding deaths over the last few months have included heart-related issues and drug withdrawals, while others had unknown causes.

Each preliminary death report from DHS includes a synopsis of the detainees' immigration and criminal histories, as well as the events leading up to the time of death.

One man, Fouad Saeed Abdulkadir, had been in immigration custody for 215 days and was awaiting an immigration court hearing when he suffered "medical distress." Another, 25-year-old Jose Castro-Rivera, was killed by a truck during an arrest.

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IMMIGRATION

Private prisons and local jails are ramping up as ICE detention exceeds capacity

Another man, Geraldo Lunas Campos, died after a "struggle" with security staff at a detention center in Texas, according to DHS. Lunas Campos' death was classified as a homicide.

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Democrats criticize the death count and reporting lag

Democratic senators wrote to Noem in February, asking for more information on detainee healthcare, oversight, and standards.

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"It is unacceptable that record numbers of people are dying in ICE custody," Judiciary Committee members wrote in February. "Each death in ICE custody is a tragedy and, based on the evidence available from agency records, 911 calls, and medical experts, many could have been prevented if not for this Administration's decisions."

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Democrats have also raised concerns about reporting delays.

ICE promises to post a news release with initial relevant details on the public website within two business days. At times, there are delays while the agency notifies the next of kin. Congress requires that ICE publicize all reports regarding in-custody deaths within 90 days.

An NPR review of webpages and announcements shows that ICE's detainee death reporting site had a lag in updating fiscal year 2026 numbers. Some deaths, such as Lunas Campos', were notified after the two-day period. The page is currently updated through early January.



NEWS

ICE is reopening shuttered prisons as detention centers. Many have a troubled past

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Georgia senators previously wrote the DHS to get more information on the increase in deaths last year, including the death of one man while was being transferred from a county jail to the Stewart Detention Center, and another of an apparent suicide. In a response from ICE in February, the agency declined to answer several questions about the specific incidents, citing pending investigations.

In response to the death during a transfer, the agency did say that transportation contractors are not medical providers and that CoreCivic, a private prison company, is actively recruiting to fill mental health staff vacancies.

DHS also said it seeks to make sure staff are trained properly in identifying mental health concerns and preventing suicides.

It said the DHS division responsible for the bulk of detentions and deportations, known as Enforcement and Removal Operations, or ERO, "holds regular town hall and recall meetings where ERO discusses the importance of mental health awareness and equips the team with the tools to recognize and respond appropriately," according to the response sent to Georgia's Democratic Sens. Jon Ossoff and Raphael Warnock.

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NPR's Martin Kesteron is credited to this report.

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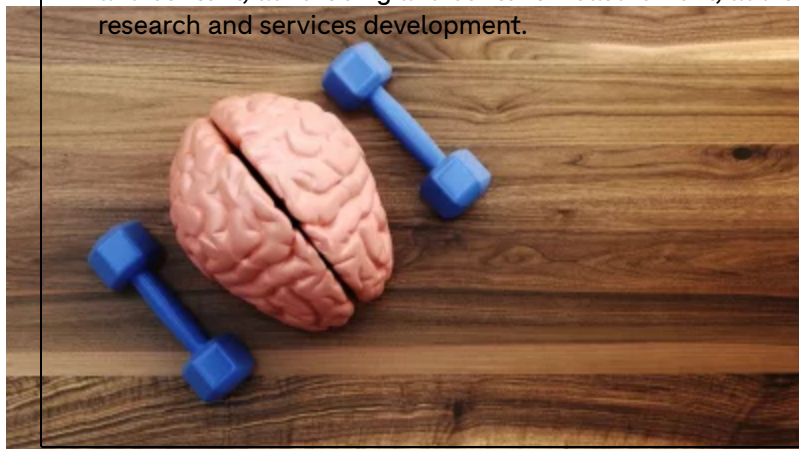
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The embarrassing truth of dating men : Pop Culture Happy Hour



This form of mental exercise may cut dementia risk for decades



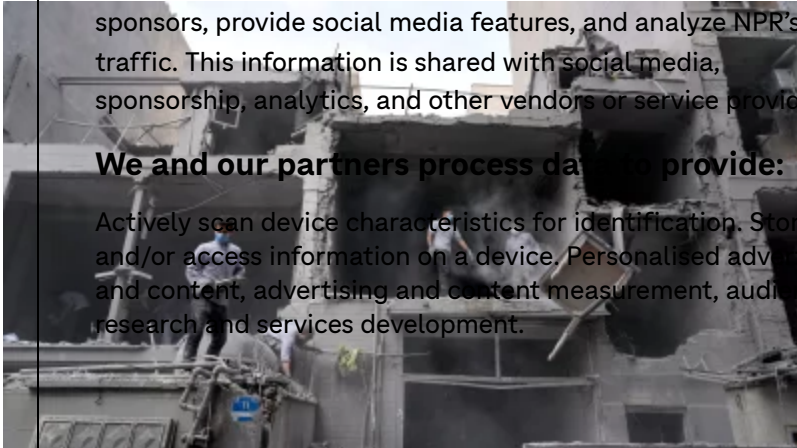
U.S. and Iran agree to 2-week ceasefire, suspending Trump's threat to annihilate Iran

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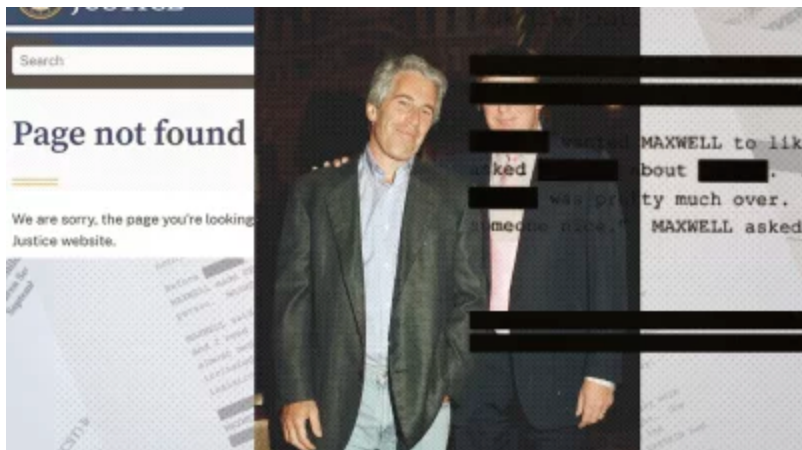
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A Trump official quits over the Iran war and Israel kills 2 top Iranian commanders



NEWS

Justice Department publishes some missing Epstein files related to Trump

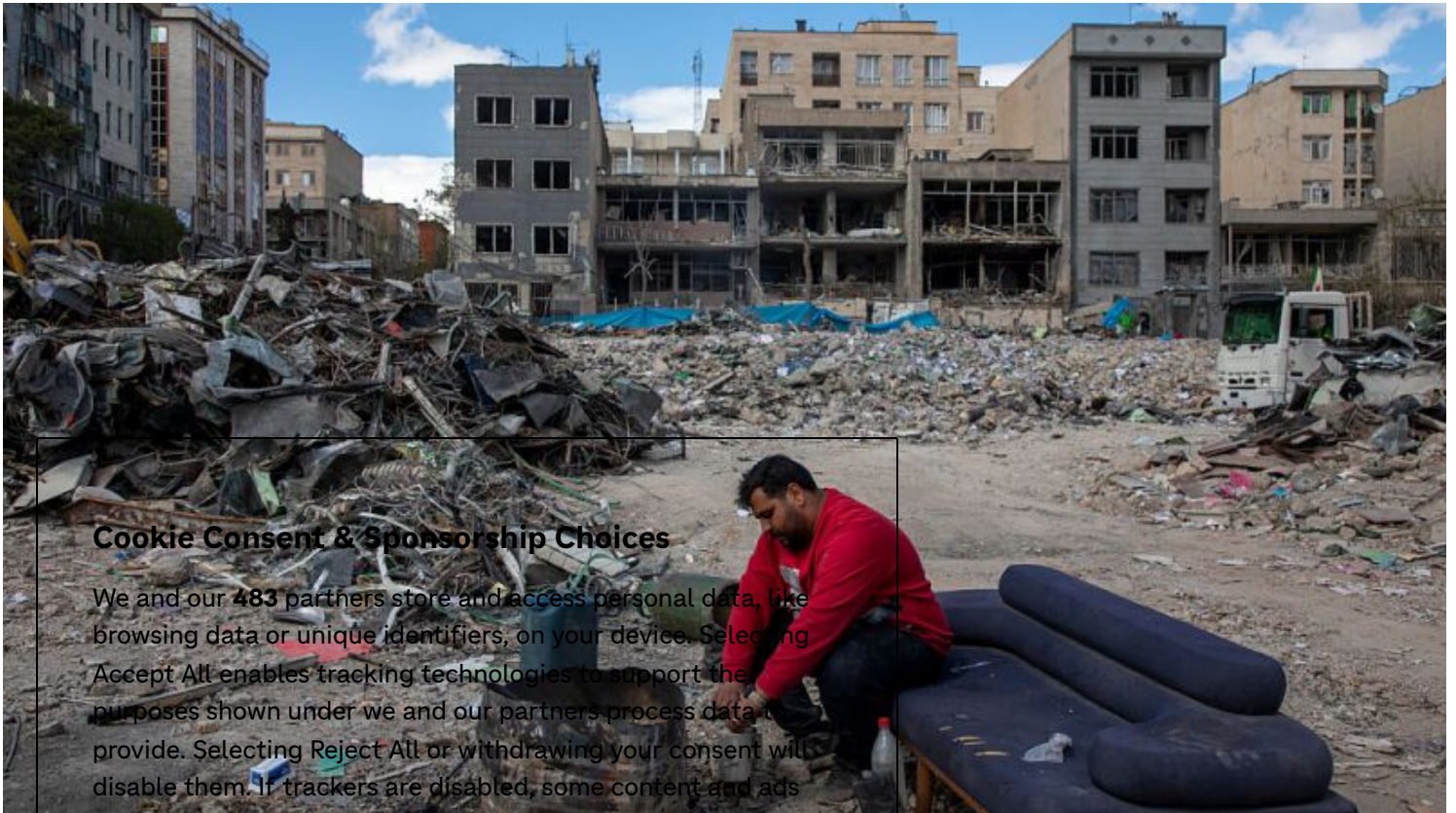
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MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT

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

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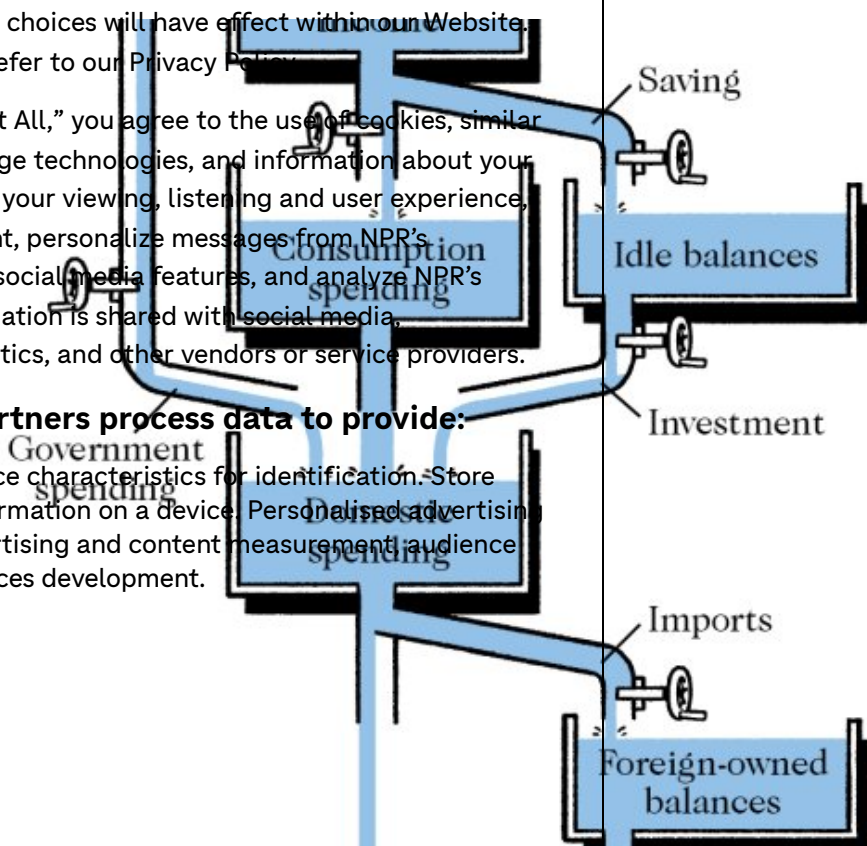
Photos: NASA releases first images from moon flyby

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HEALTHY **Telehealth abortion will remain available for now, after a federal judge's ruling**

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Congressional Democrats raise alarm over Trump's comments on Iran

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U.K. issues Ye travel ban over antisemitism, leading to festival cancellation



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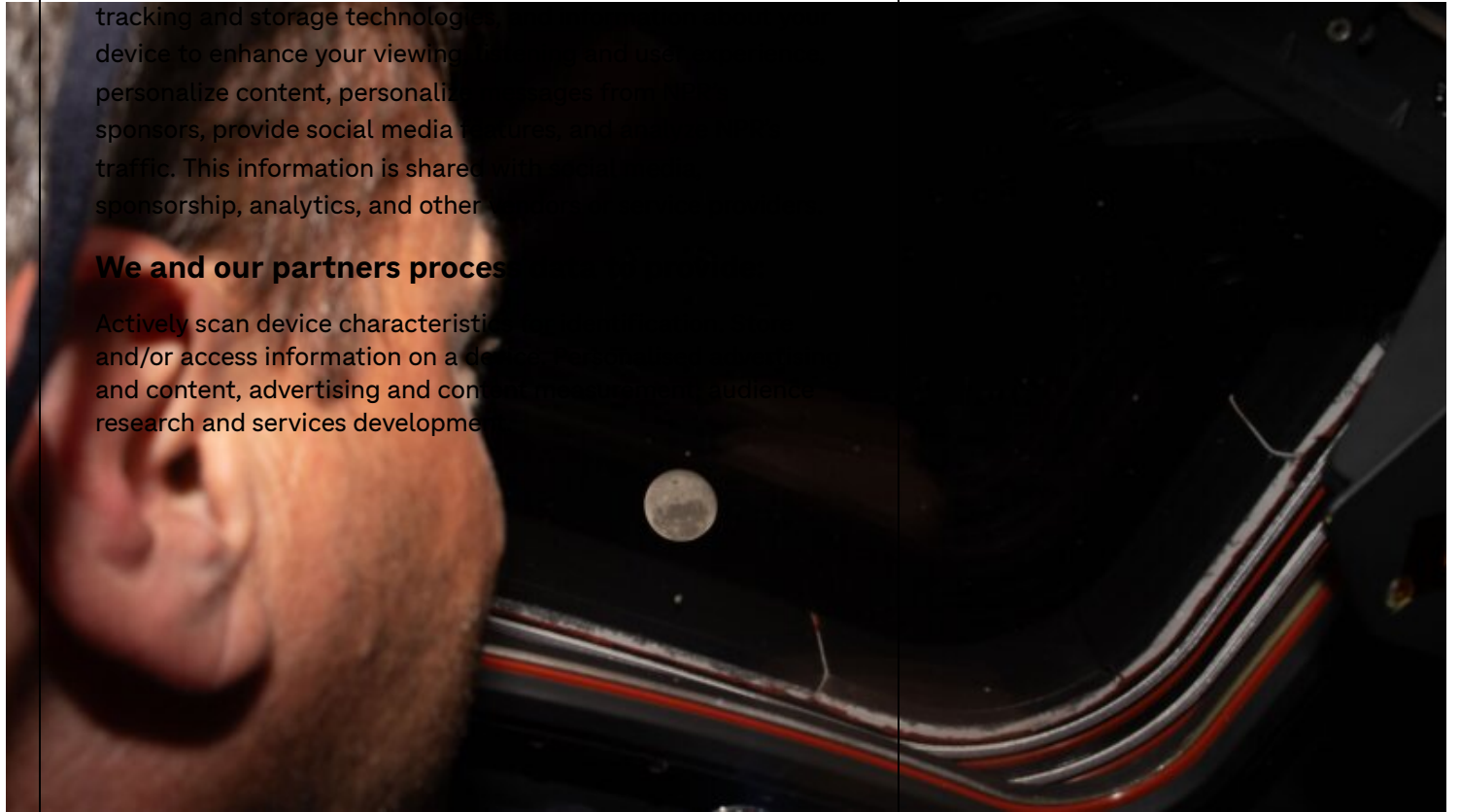
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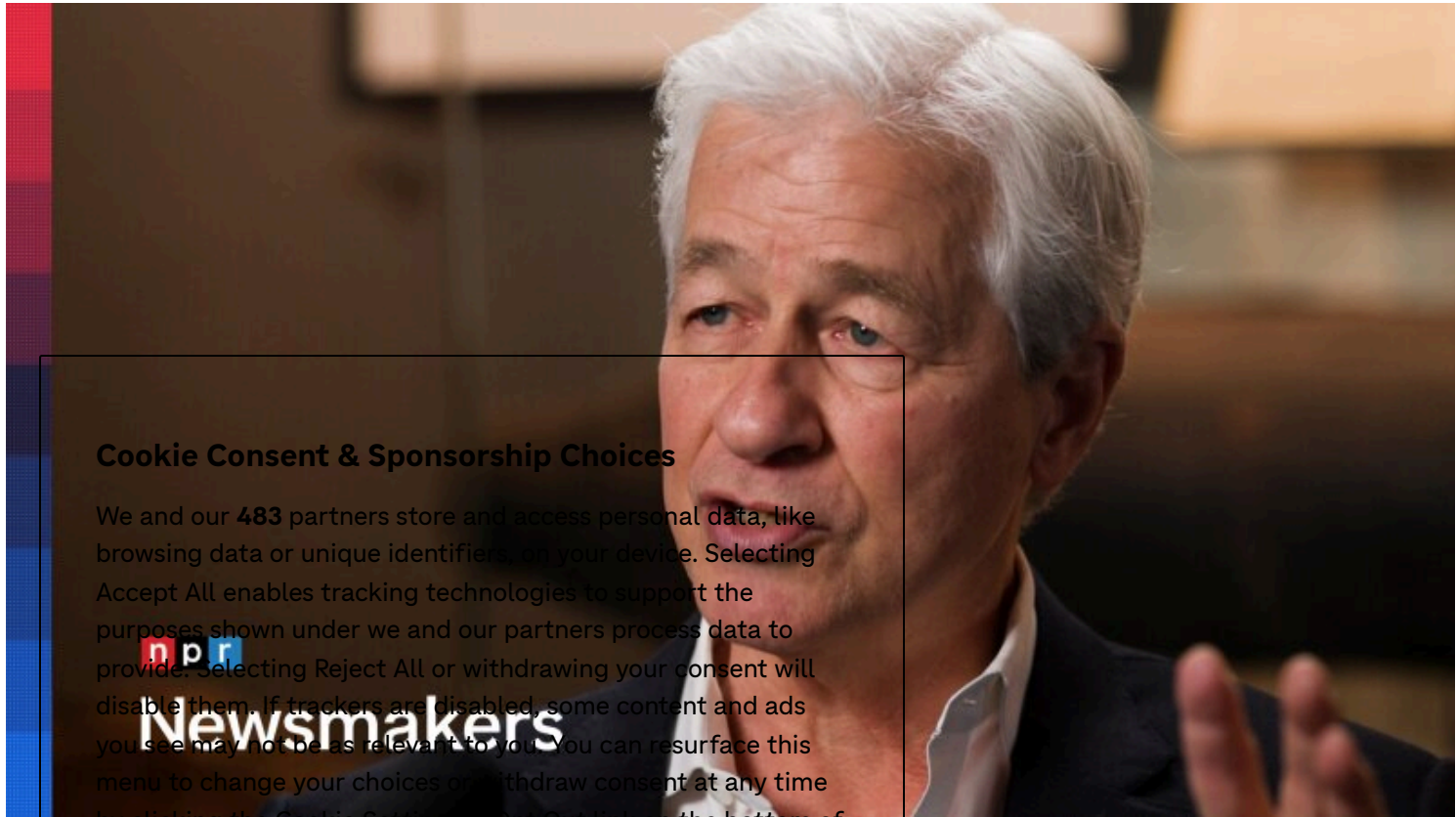
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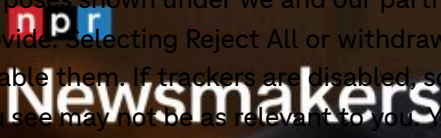
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Astronauts suggest naming a moon crater 'Carroll' after their commander's late wife



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