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# First Afrikaners arrive in U.S. under radically redrawn refugee program

UPDATED MAY 12, 2025 · 3:08 PM ET


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 Ximena Bustillo

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Newly arrived South Africans listen to representatives from Homeland Security and the State Department deliver welcome statements in a hangar at Atlantic Aviation Dulles near Washington Dulles International Airport on May 12, 2025 in **Massachusetts**

*Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images*

The first group of White South African refugees arrived in the U.S. on Monday under President Trump's executive order mandating they be prioritized for resettlement — even as the broader refugee program remains largely on hold.



The 59 Afrikaners, descendants of mainly Dutch colonists, underwent expedited reviews that took months, were brought to the U.S. on a government-chartered flight, and were greeted at Dulles International Airport by federal officials – all unconventional steps for the refugee resettlement program, which can take years to process.

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### WORLD, REORDERING

## White South African Afrikaner refugees arrive in U.S. on a government-chartered plane

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Families on Monday arrived at the airport with their luggage; children donned pajamas and carried small American flags and stuffed animals as their parents walked them through a private airplane hanger.

Troy Edgar, deputy Homeland Security secretary, and Christopher Landau, the deputy secretary of state, greeted the families, shaking hands and posing for photos.

"Welcome to America," Landau told the families. "I want you to know that you are really welcome here."

But their admission to the U.S. has drawn scrutiny from resettlement agencies in the U.S., who've have faced sharp budget, resource, and personnel cuts since Trump took office.

Among his first executive actions, Trump temporarily paused the refugee resettlement program. Various agencies including the State Department have also paused disbursing funding for critical services such as the home, job and school assistance the Afrikaners are poised to receive.

The pause sent the refugee resettlement agencies into turmoil as refugees already cleared to arrive in the U.S. received notice their flights had been cancelled.

Among those left in limbo were Afghans who worked with the U.S. military, a move that some Republicans have criticized. Judges have ordered the government to at least resume the refugee program for those who had already been approved to travel, but the administration is fighting the court order.

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When asked whether the administration would reopen the broader refugee resettlement program, he said "Preparations are still an ongoing consideration."

"Some of the criteria are making sure that refugees did not pose any challenge to our national security and that they could be assimilated easily into our country," he said about the decision to let in Afrikaners.

**Episcopal Church ends refugee partnership**

The Episcopal Church on Monday announced it would terminate its partnership with the government to resettle refugees, citing moral opposition to resettling

white Afrikaners.

Episcopal Migration Ministries said it had been notified by the federal government that it was expected to resettle some of the refugees.

"It has been painful to watch one group of refugees, selected in a highly unusual manner, receive preferential treatment over many others who have been waiting in refugee camps or dangerous conditions for years," wrote Most Rev. Sean Rowe, the presiding bishop of the church, adding that others including the Afghans and Christians fleeing persecution have been denied refuge.

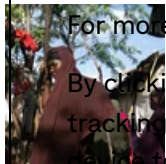
Trump, Elon Musk, and Secretary of State Marco Rubio have all been vocal about what they say is persecution Afrikaners — many of whom are farmers — face in South Africa. **What's happening in South Africa fits the textbook definition of why the refugee program was created.** Deputy Chief of Staff Stephen Miller told reporters last week. **This is persecution based on a protected characteristic, in this case, race.** This is race-based persecution. Miller doubled down on the administration's efforts to limit the broader refugee program.

**The U.S. Refugee Program has been a catastrophic failure,** he said of past administrations' application of the program. Trump's changes, he continued, are **an example of the president returning the refugee program to what it was intended to do.**

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**More Afrikaners eligible for resettlement**  
On Monday, the U.S. Embassy and Consulates in South Africa published a notice about the refugee admissions program for "for Afrikaners and disfavored minorities in South Africa who are victims of unjust racial discrimination," indicating this cohort is the first of more to come.

"Today, the United States sends a clear message, in alignment with the administration's America First policy agenda, that America will take action to protect victims of racial discrimination." State Department spokesperson Tammy Bruce said in a statement.

To be eligible for resettlement consideration individuals must be of South African nationality, be of Afrikaner ethnicity or a member of a racial minority in the country, and must be able to articulate a past experience of persecution or fear of future persecution.



**STATE OF THE WORLD FROM NPR**  
**Refugees in Limbo with US Resettlement Uncertainty**

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One of the agencies assisting with resettlement is the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants. They are providing services to 14 Afrikaners across Idaho, Iowa and North Carolina.

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"We'll continue to do our part regardless of country of origin," Eskinder Negash, USCRI President and CEO, said in a statement to NPR. "We are hopeful that the arrival of this group of refugees indicates the government's intention to restart the U.S. refugee program and help other refugees in need of resettlement services."

—With assistance from Jack Jenkins of Religion News Service and NPR's Michele Kelemen.

refugees afrikaners south africa immigration policy

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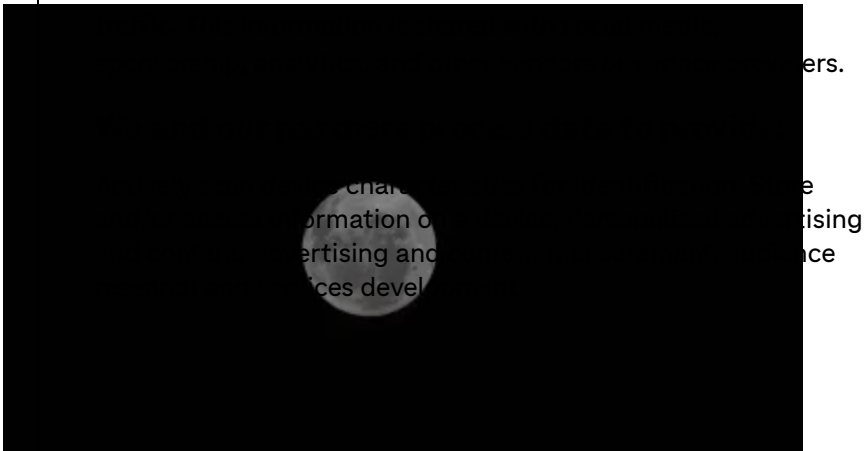
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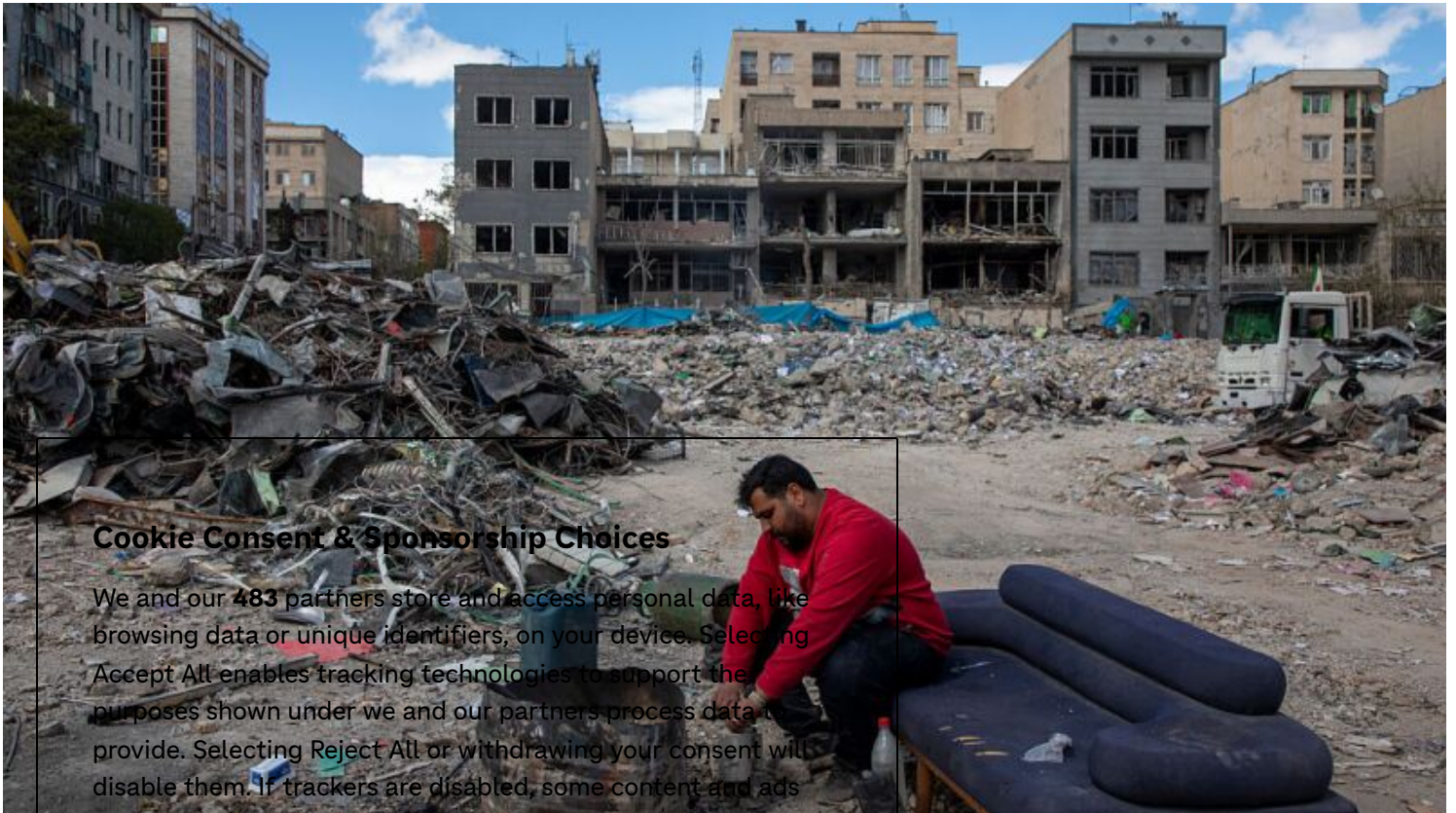
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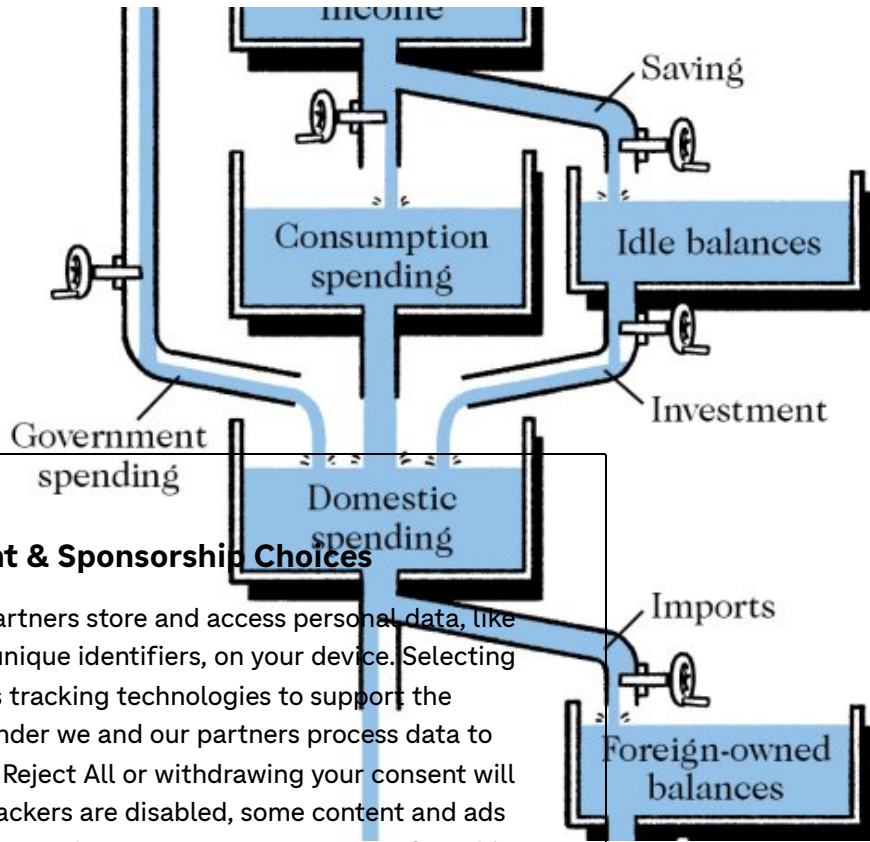
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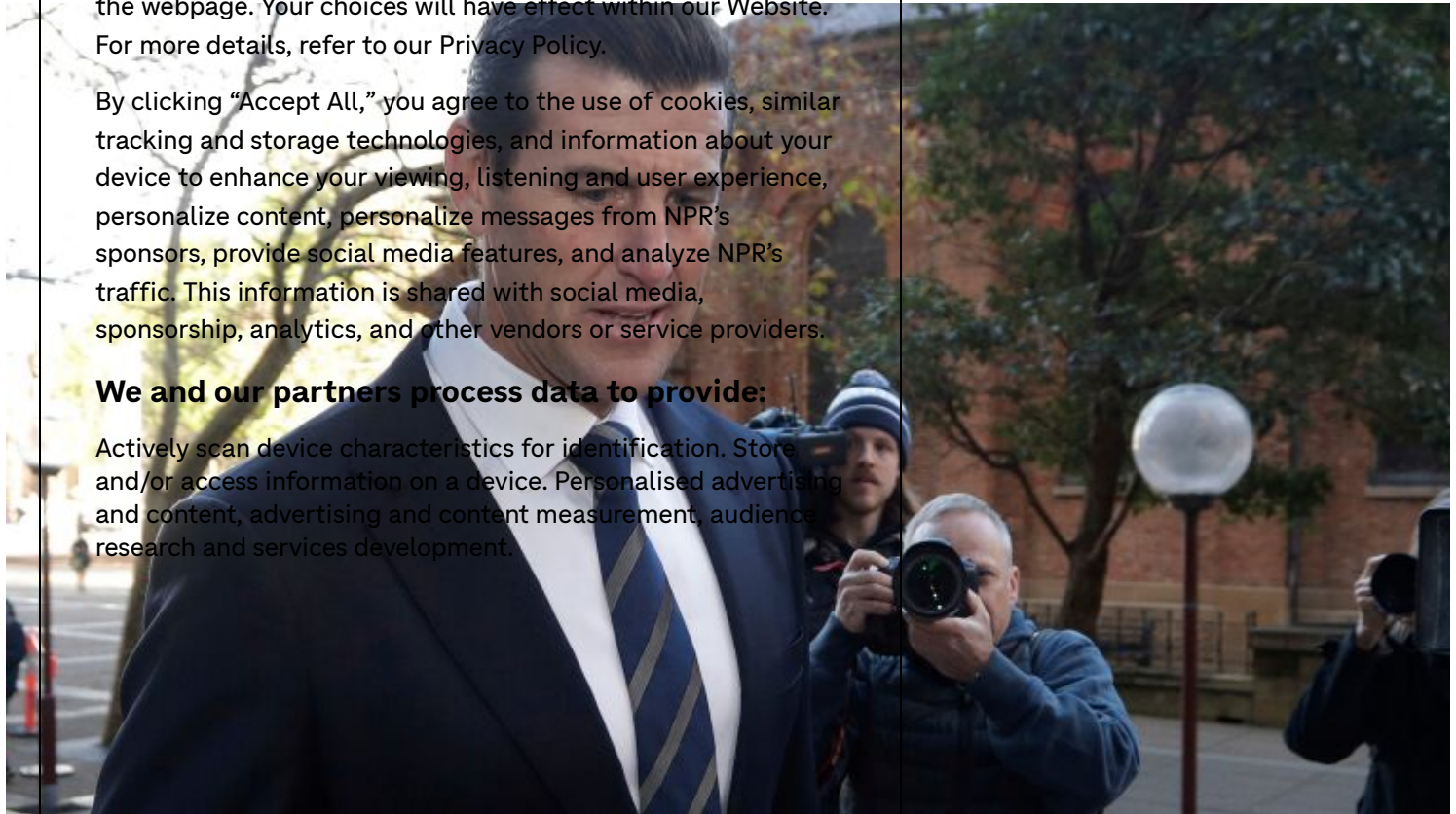
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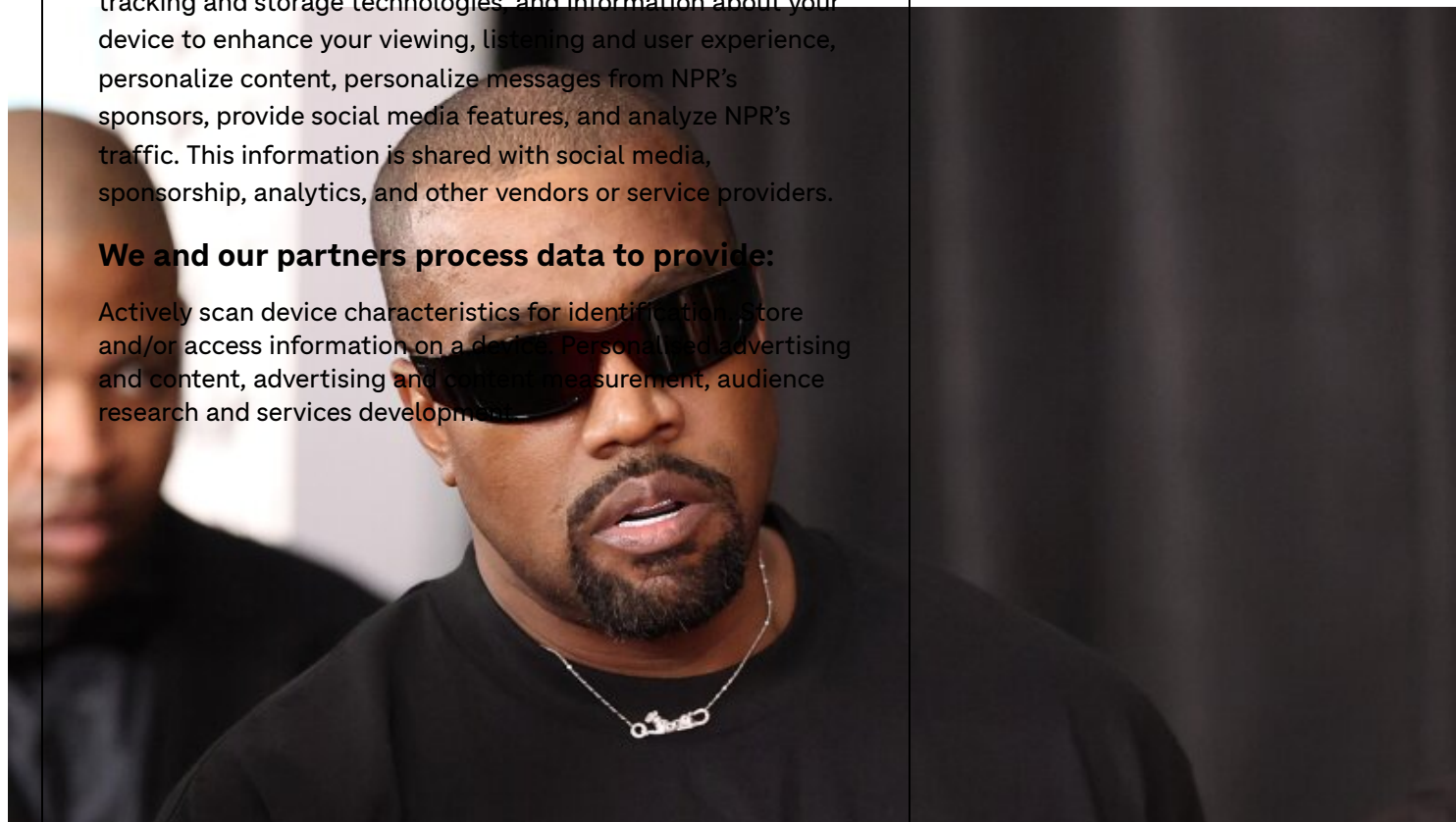
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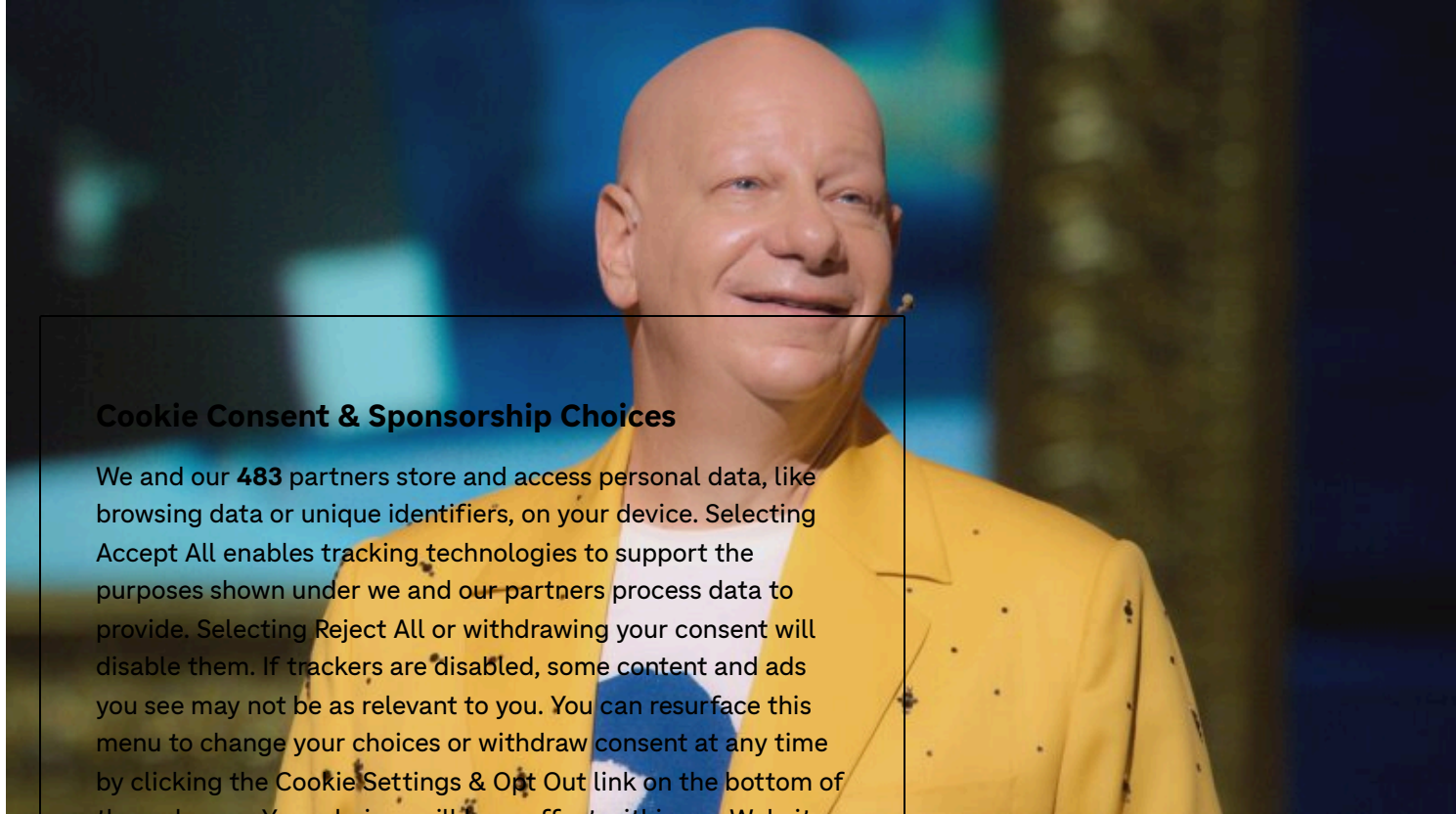
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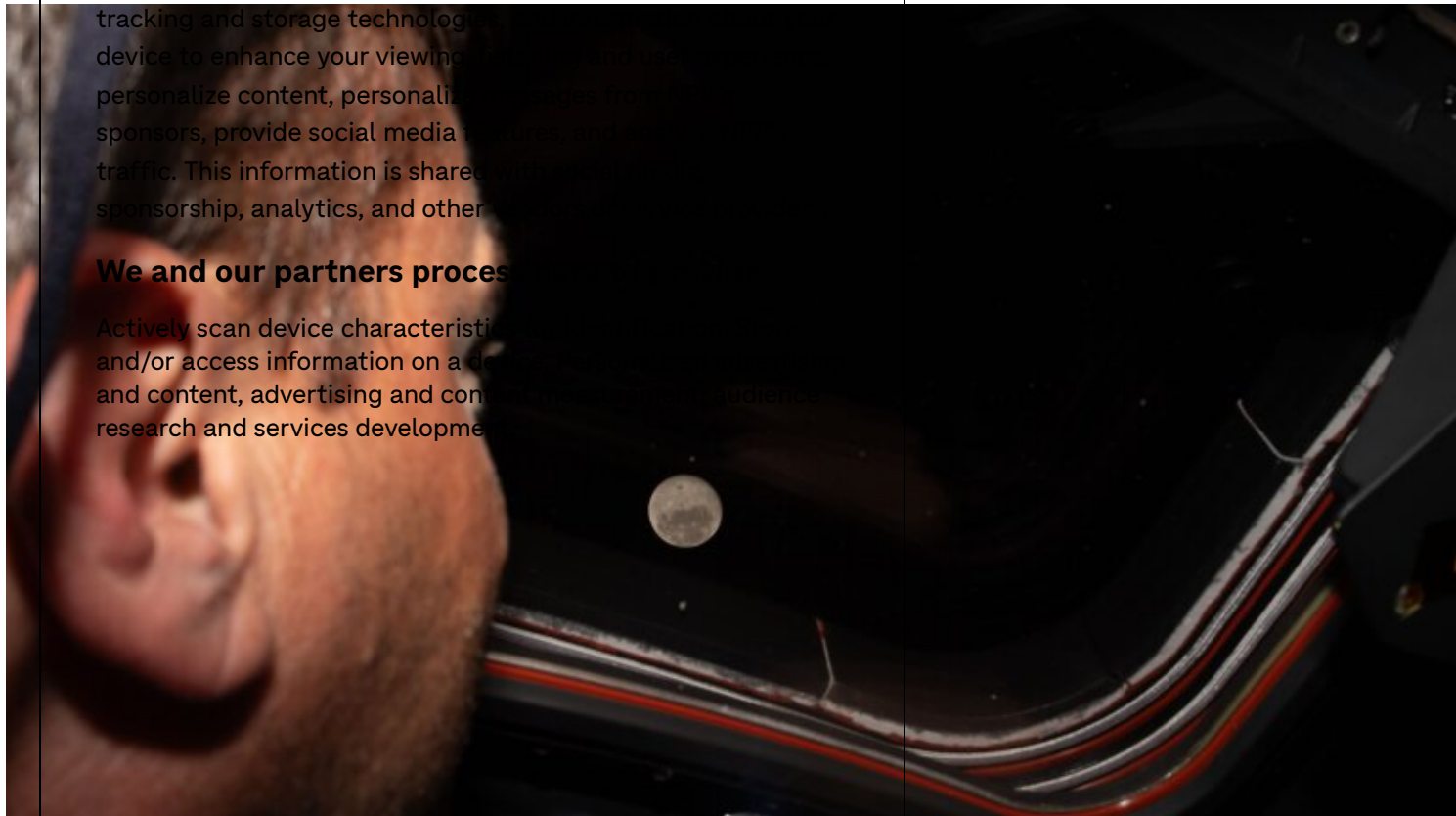
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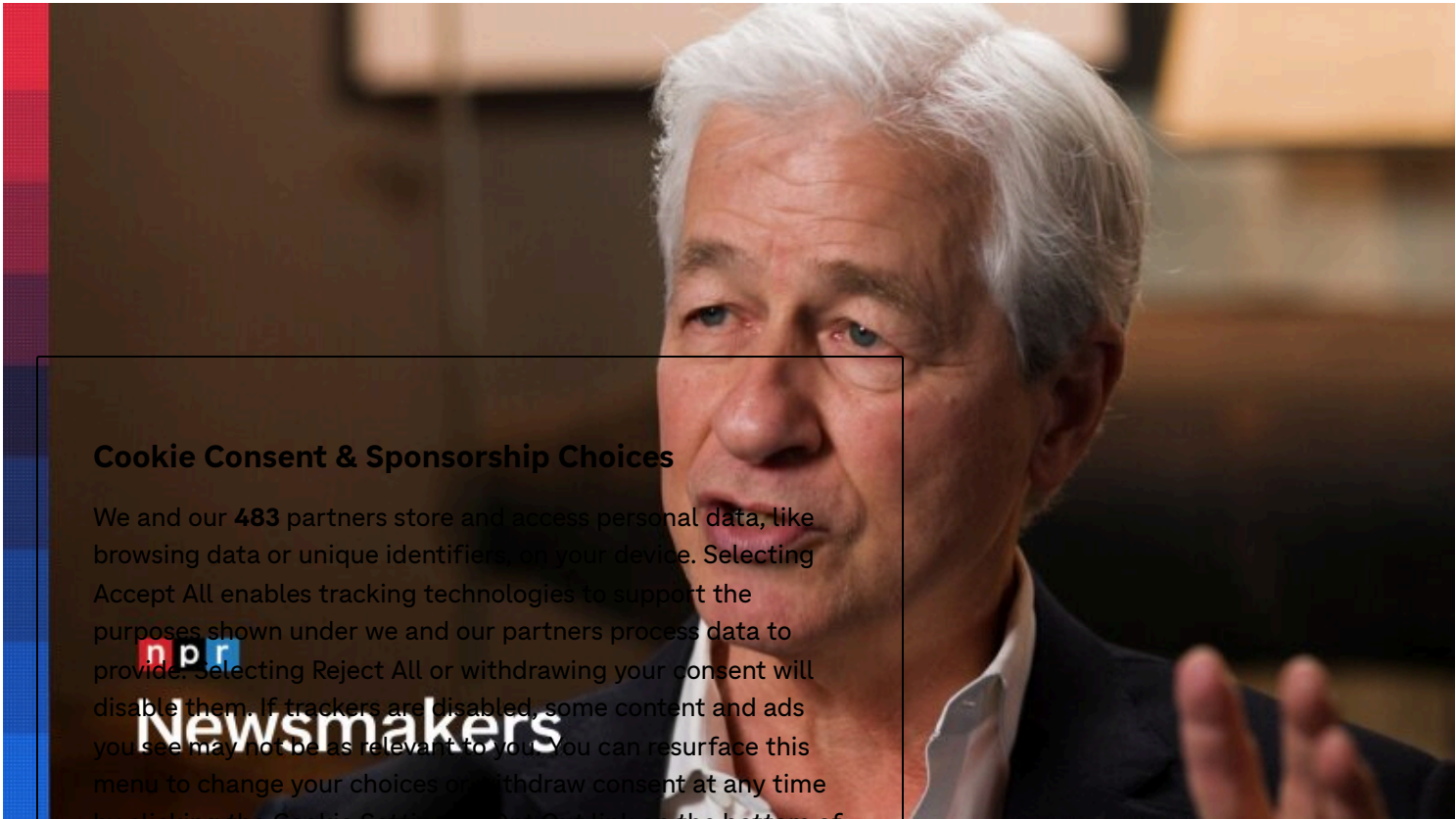
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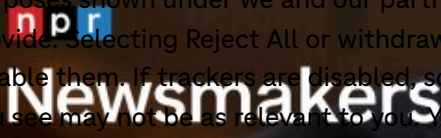
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