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Ahead of hurricane season, the National Weather Service is reeling from DOGE's cuts

MAY 24, 2025 · 8:02 AM ET

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The National Weather Service is dealing with staff shortages and DOGE cuts as hurricane season nears. NPR's Scott Simon asks former NWS meteorologist Brian LaMarre about the impact of the cuts.

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SCOTT SIMON, HOST:

The Atlantic hurricane season begins on June 1, and government forecasters predict it may be even worse than usual. It's already been a bad year for tornadoes. Severe storms and tornadoes last week killed more than two dozen people in Kentucky, Missouri and Virginia. The National Weather Service, which is charged with tracking storms and warning the public, is short-staffed after more than 500 workers were cut by the administration's Department of Government Efficiency or left on their own.

Brian LaMarre was the meteorologist-in-charge of the Tampa Bay area until last month, when he took an early retirement offer. He joins us now from Tampa. Brian

LaMarre, thank you so much for being with us!
BRIAN LAMARRE: Hey, thank you, Scott. Thanks for having me on the show today.

SIMON: In your judgment, how serious are these cuts to the important work of the National Weather Service?

LAMARRE: Now, the National Weather Service - the mission is protection of life and property. That is the utmost importance. And throughout my career in the

National Weather Service, I started over 30 years ago - there's always been staffing challenges that have impacted offices across the country. And when I started, we had between 5,000 and 6,000 people that worked for the National Weather Service. And over the past 10, 20 years, that number has gradually declined to about 4,500. And since January, there's been about 550 people that

have either accepted an early retirement, or if they were in their probationary period, a great number of them were let go. So for the first time in the history of the National Weather Service, the personnel is below 4,000 people.

SIMON: We mentioned the deadly storms last weekend. The weather station, as I understand it, covering one of the hardest-hit areas was in Jackson, Kentucky. They say they were fully staffed at the time, but it's, I gather, one of several offices that has reportedly had to cut overnight hours recently. So had the staffing shortages been in effect then, would lives have been at risk?

LAMARRE: It is true. There are eight offices out of 122 across the National Weather Service that have fallen below a certain level of staffing, where it then requires them to not be able to operate 24/7. And the facts are, there were people

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on the overnight shift at the Jackson, Kentucky National Weather Service office. What they did was the day before, they actually had to plan ahead of time to make sure that they had people come into the office. So it's pretty much like an all-hands-on-deck type of mentality. That's how the National Weather Service operates. I remember it throughout my 30-year career. You know, it's basically similar to emergency response, firefighters, medical community, the media, where you are ready to go.

SIMON: Well, with respect for those conscientious public servants who did the job that was necessary, could that also be an argument that they would do the job with fewer people?

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LAMARRE: 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 shown under we and our partners process data to short-term challenge of that with short staffing. The National Weather Service budget costs between \$4 and \$5 a year per U.S. citizen. It is a very small-budget operation for an agency that is charged with 24/7 operations, the protection of life and property. And all of the data out is the foundation for all of the private sector value-added information. You know, a lot of people think that I can open up my phone and click the weather app, and, you know, why do we need the National Weather Service? And so a lot of people, I feel, take it for granted.

SIMON: Are you concerned about whether the National Weather Service is prepared for the hurricane and seasons ahead?

LAMARRE: I think the National Weather Service is going to continue to do its mission. We and our partners process data to provide the point. And that's where I get back to with is it sustainable? Because burnout can happen very easily if there are a high frequency of high-impact weather events. So the National Weather Service is actually creating these mutual aid plans, again, for the short-term fix of this challenge. And what I mean by mutual aid is a group of offices will be working together. So if there's three offices and one of them is critically understaffed, then those two other offices will be redistributing the workload. And that will allow that short-staffed office to focus on the lifesaving mission of issuing warnings, working with elected officials. But again, that's the short-term picture.

SIMON: But it sounds like you don't think that the National Weather Service will fall down or be less prepared or somehow let down the American public.

LAMARRE: I don't because, again, I - being one of them for over three decades, failure is not an option. You know, I know that's a popular phrase. I've heard it in NASA. It is one that is used by the National Weather Service, but again, it's not sustainable for the long term. And when you have 122 offices and many of them are short-staffed - eight of them are critically short-staffed - that right there is a recipe for disaster when you look at the long-range forecast. So again, meteorologists like to forecast the weather. I think we're talking today about forecasting the future of the National Weather Service, and there needs to be a high priority on funding and staffing.

SIMON: Brian LaMarre, a former meteorologist-in-charge with the National Weather Service in Tampa, now chief meteorologist with the consultancy Inspire

Weather. Mr. LaMarre, thanks so much for being with us.

LAMARRE: Thank you, Scott. Appreciate it.

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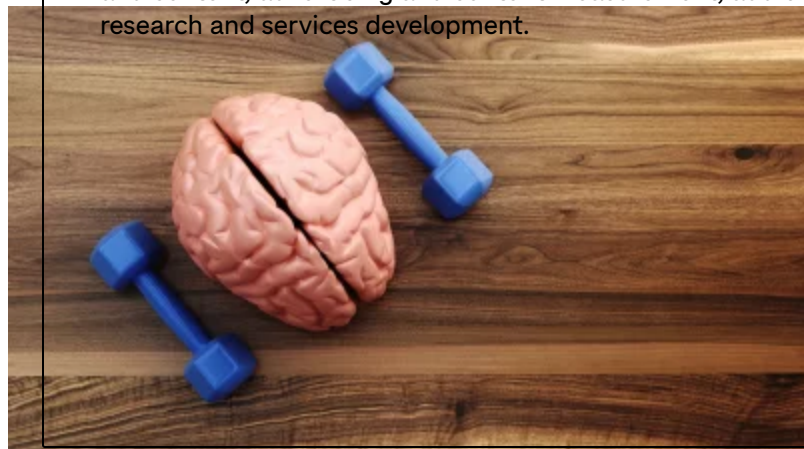
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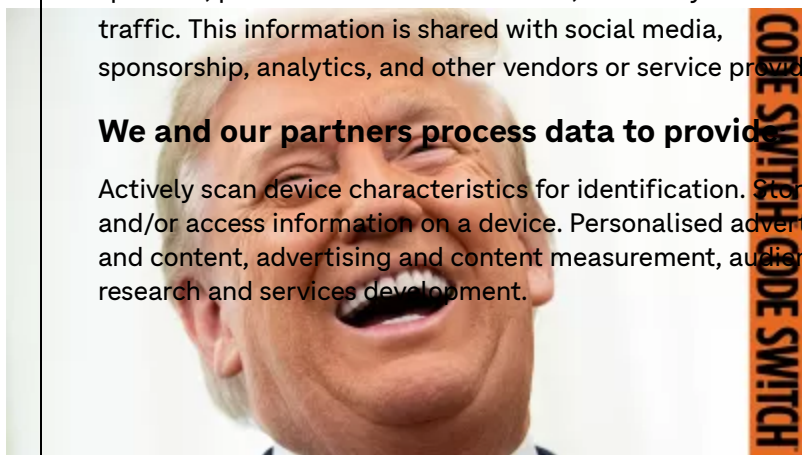
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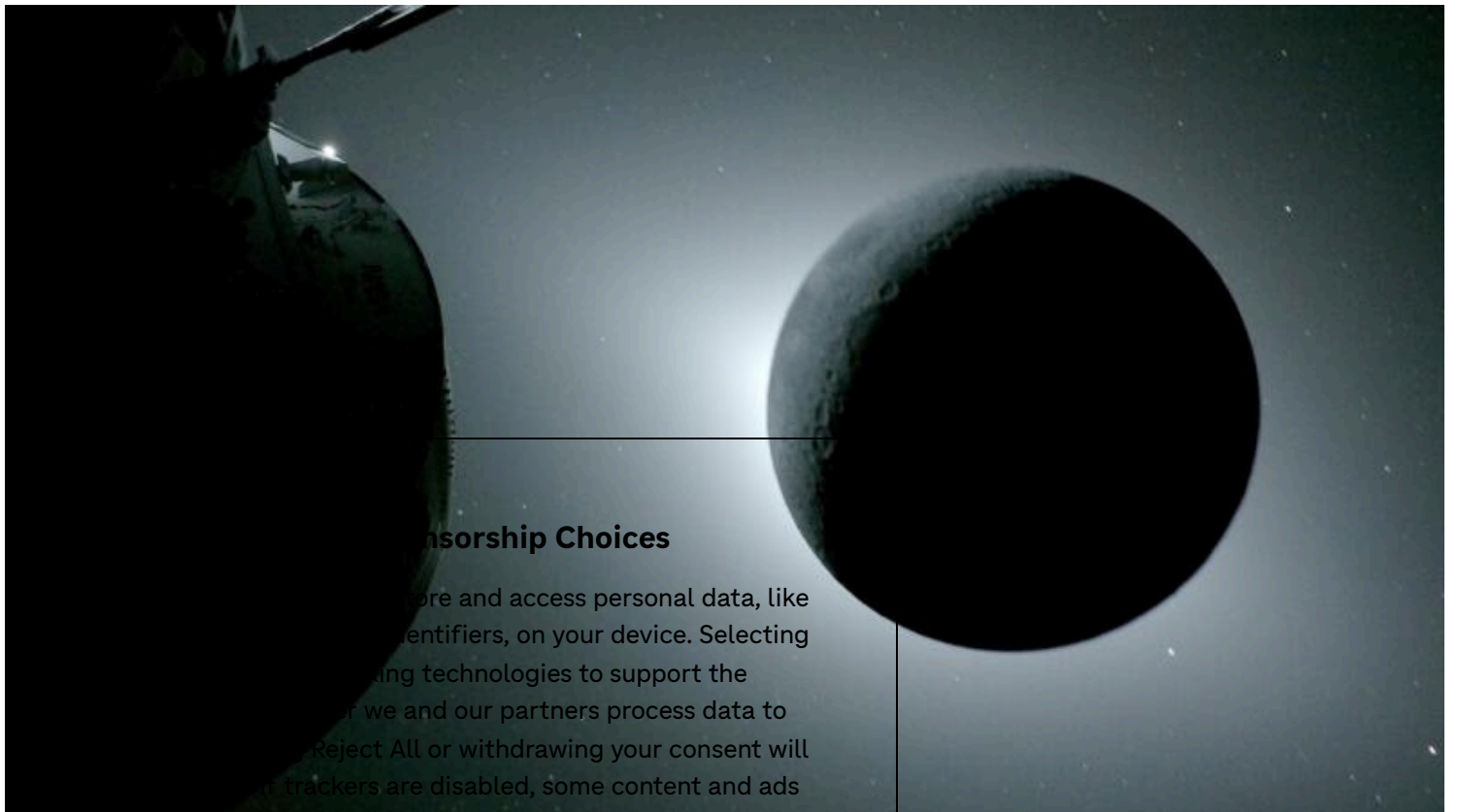
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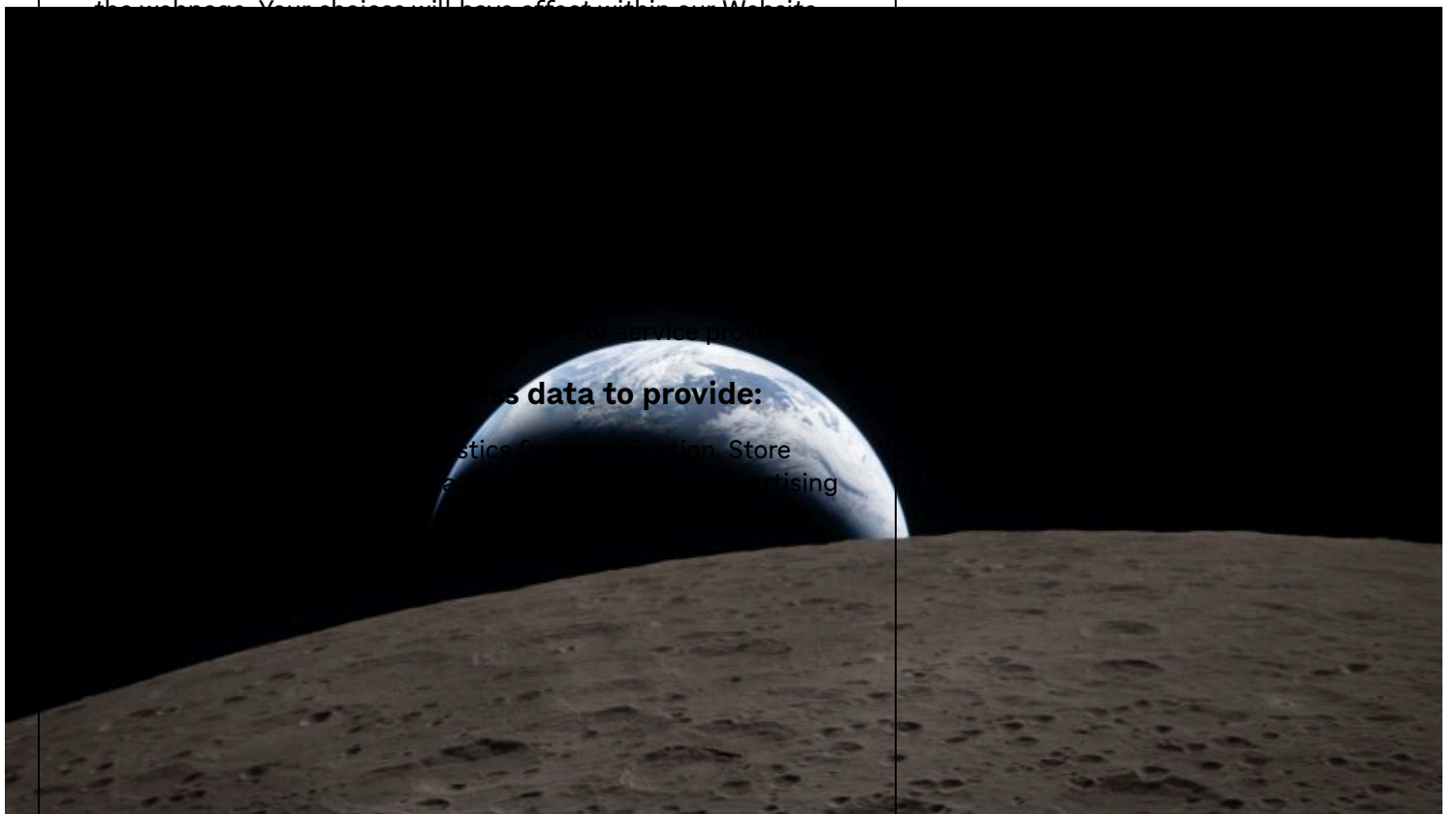


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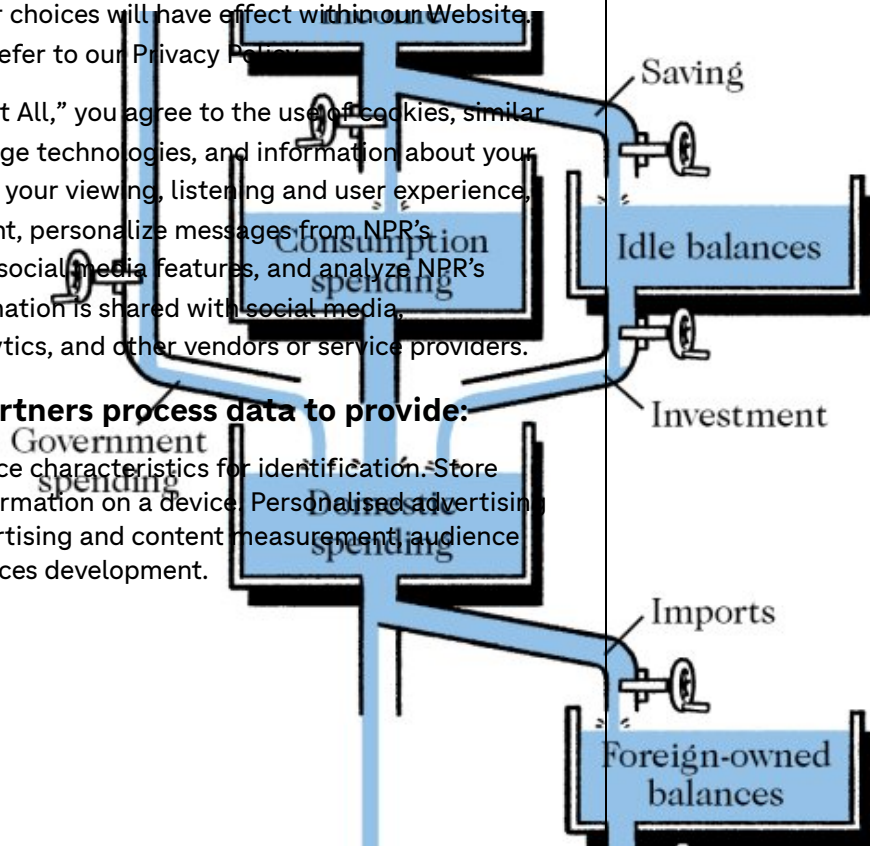
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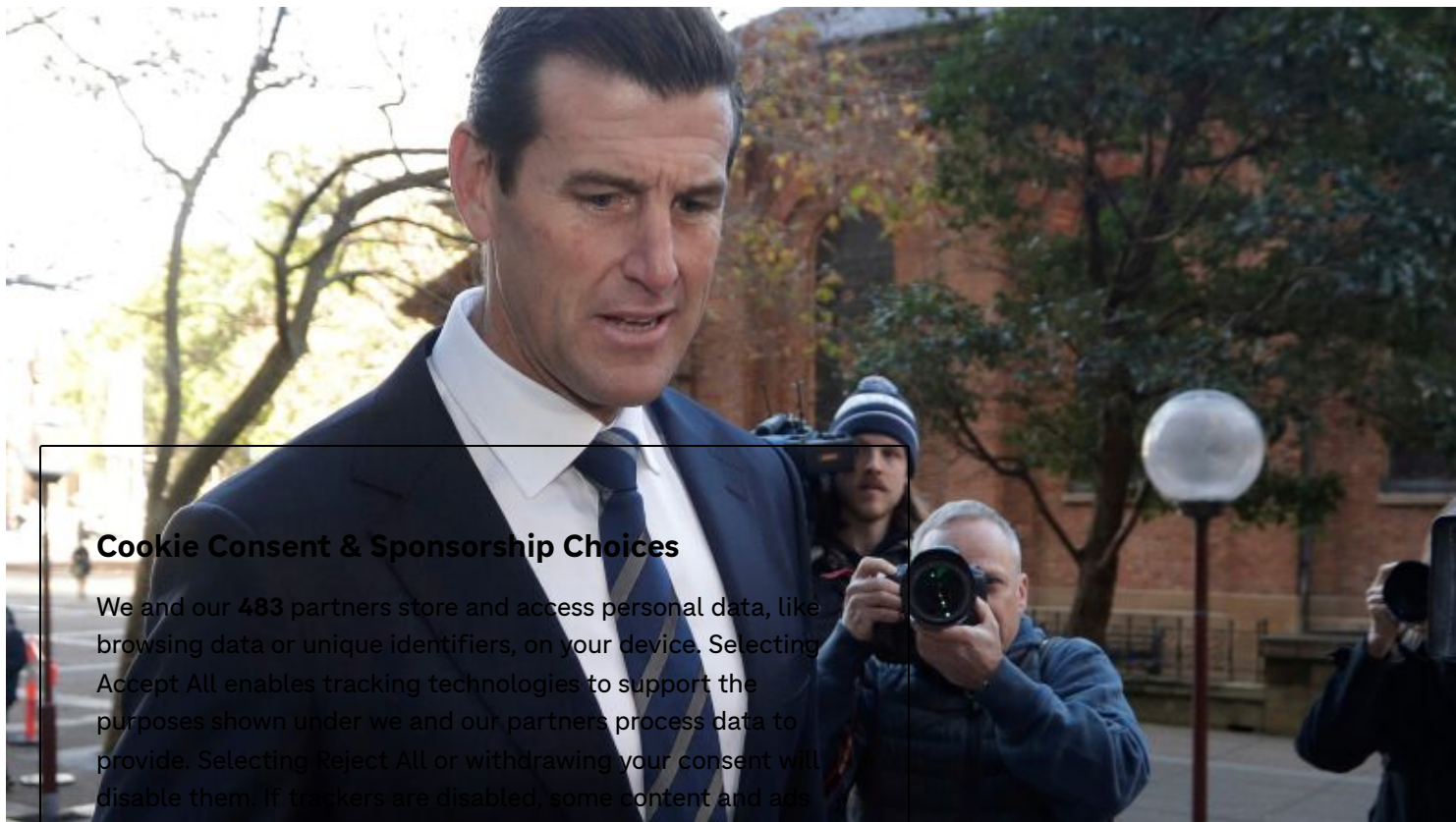
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PLANET MONEY NEWSLETTER

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PLANET MONEY

Reese's heir vs. chocolate skimpflation

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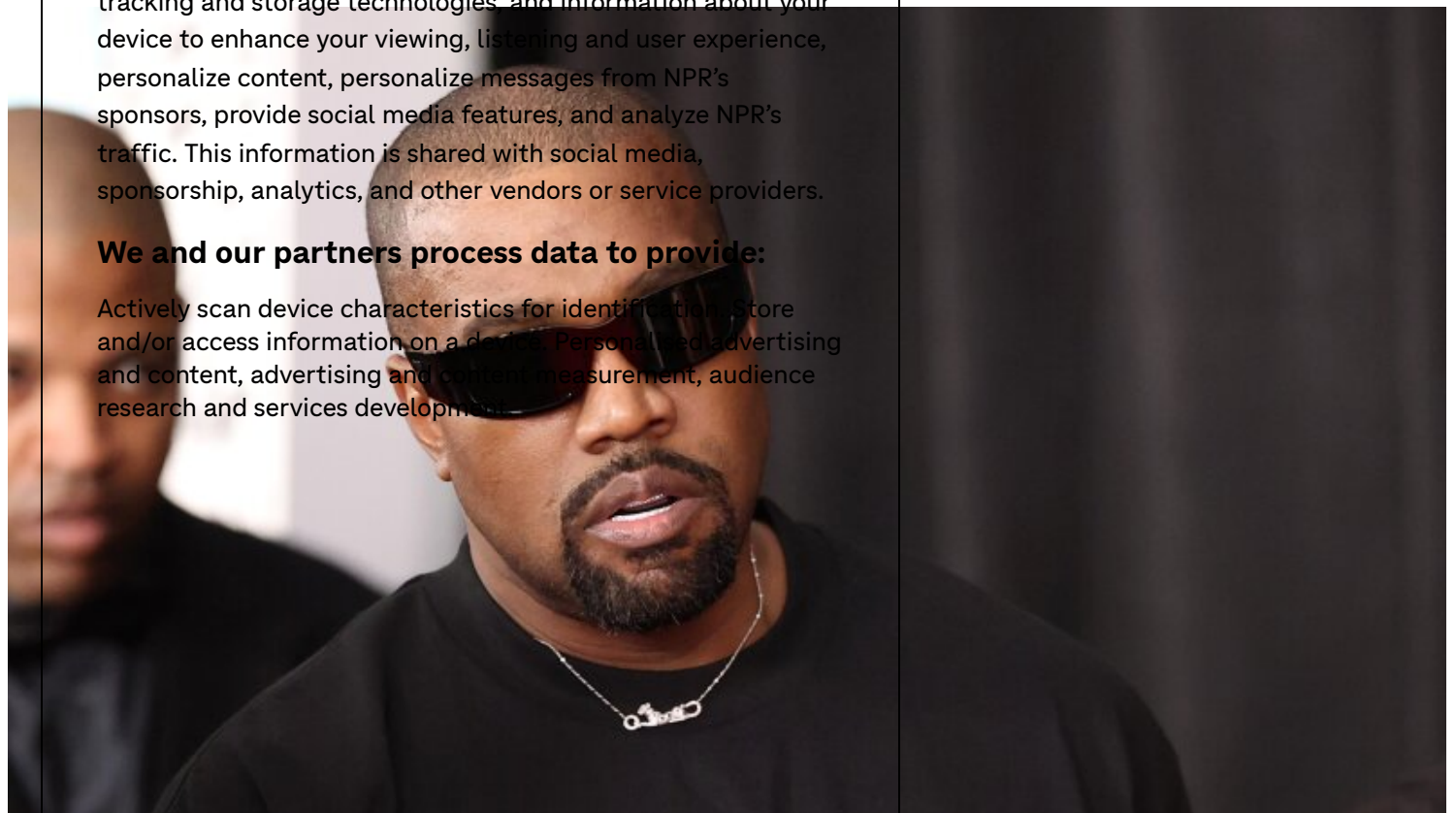
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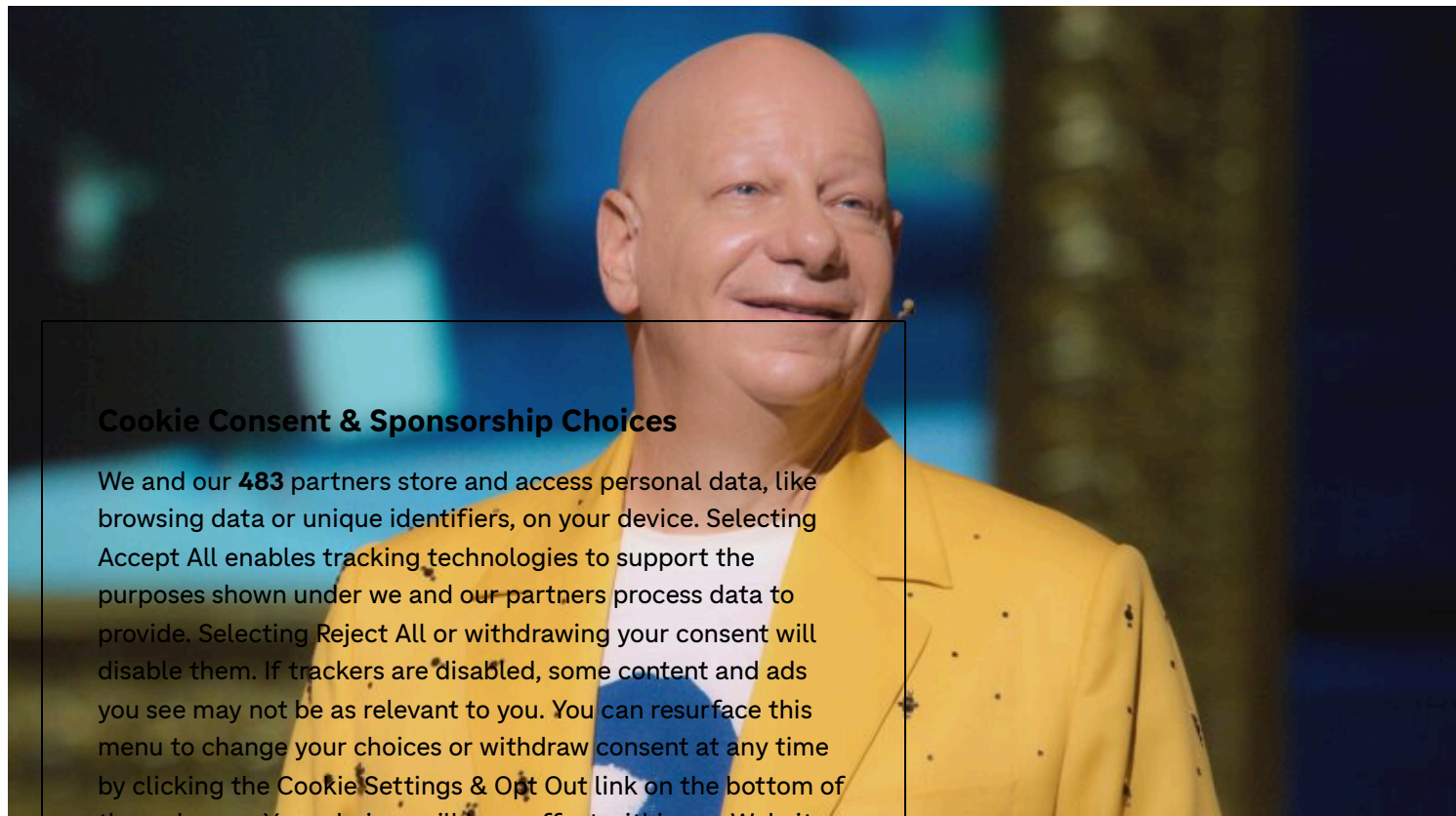
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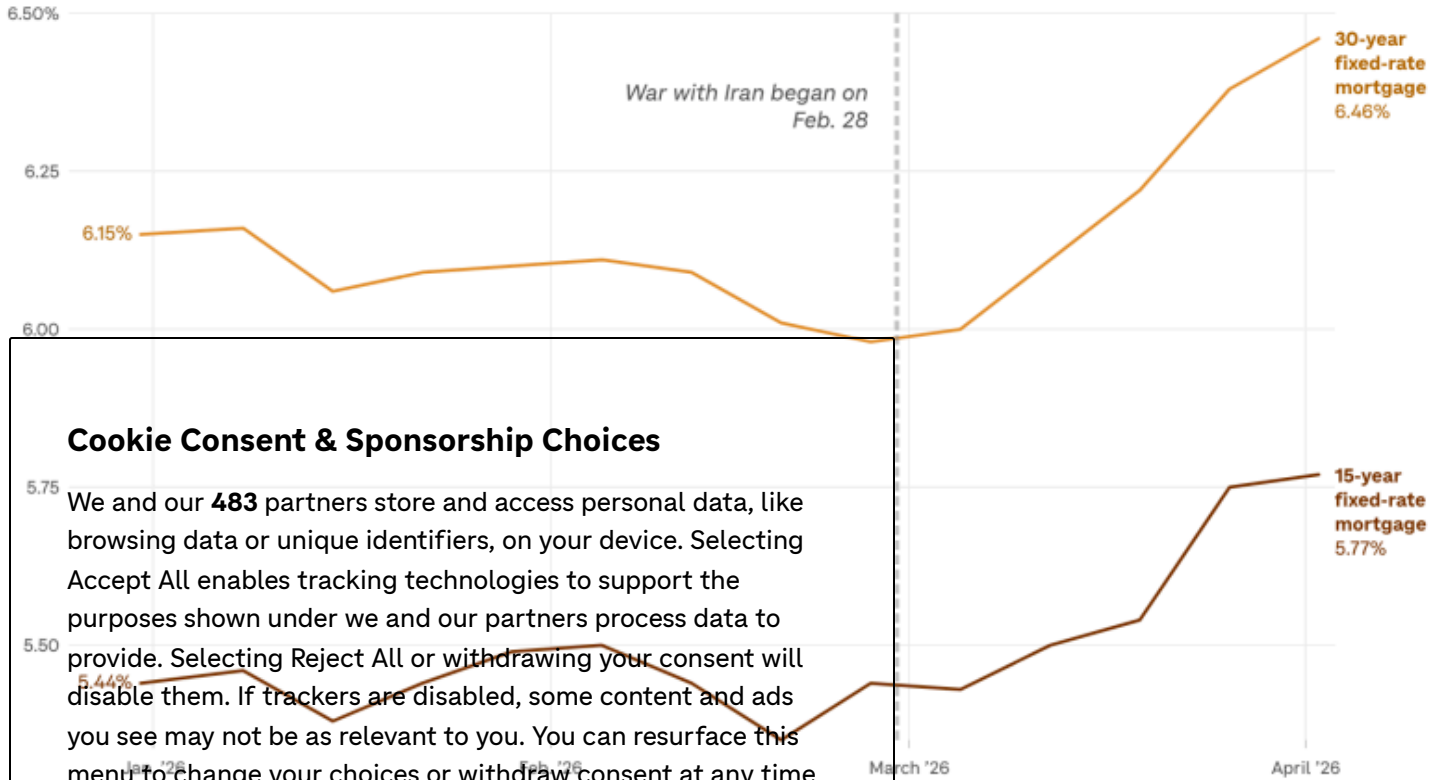
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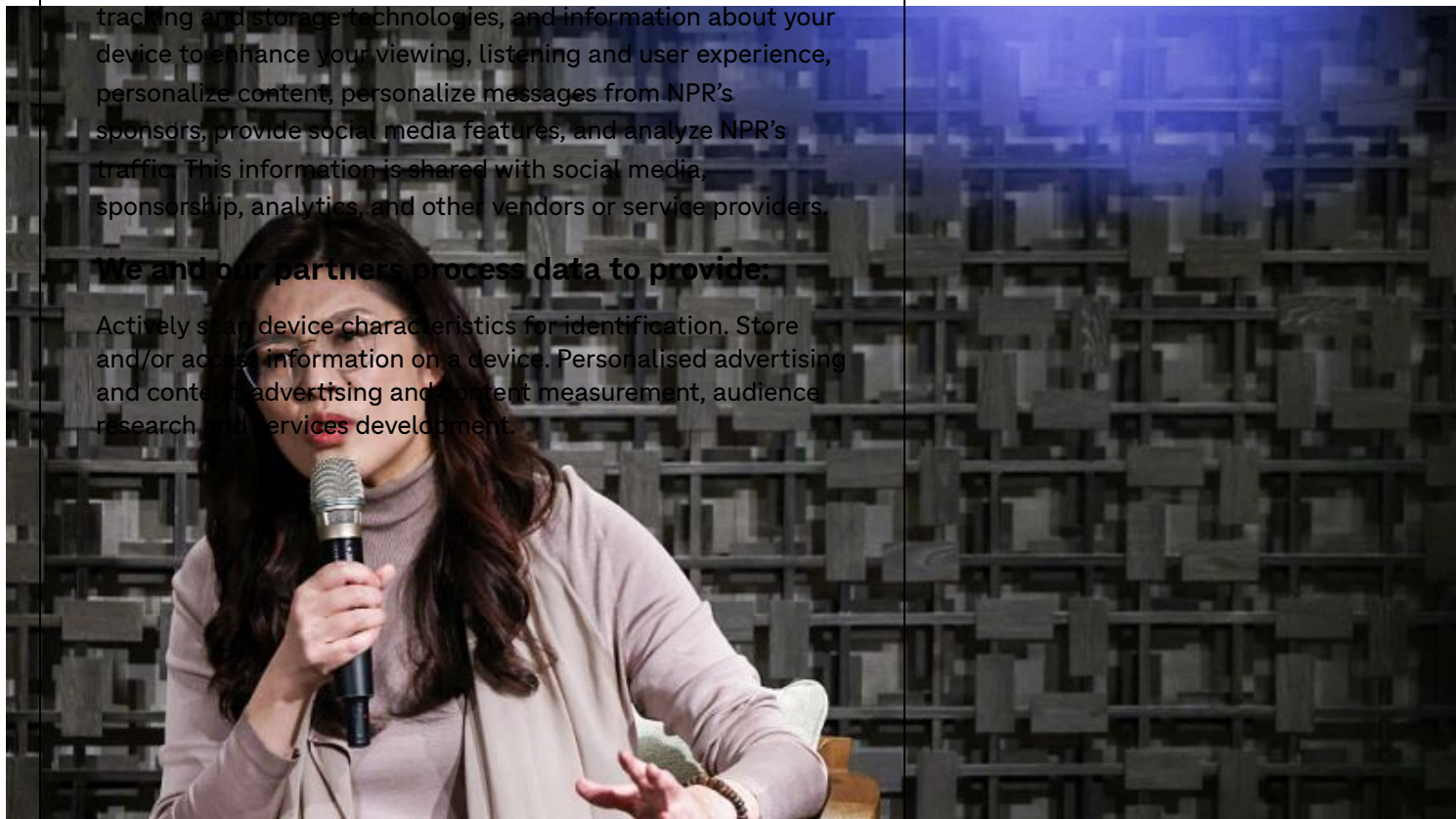
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