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POLITICS

Who has President Trump pardoned and why?

NOVEMBER 10, 2025 - 10:04 AM ET

HEARD ON MORNING EDITION

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By Joe Hernandez

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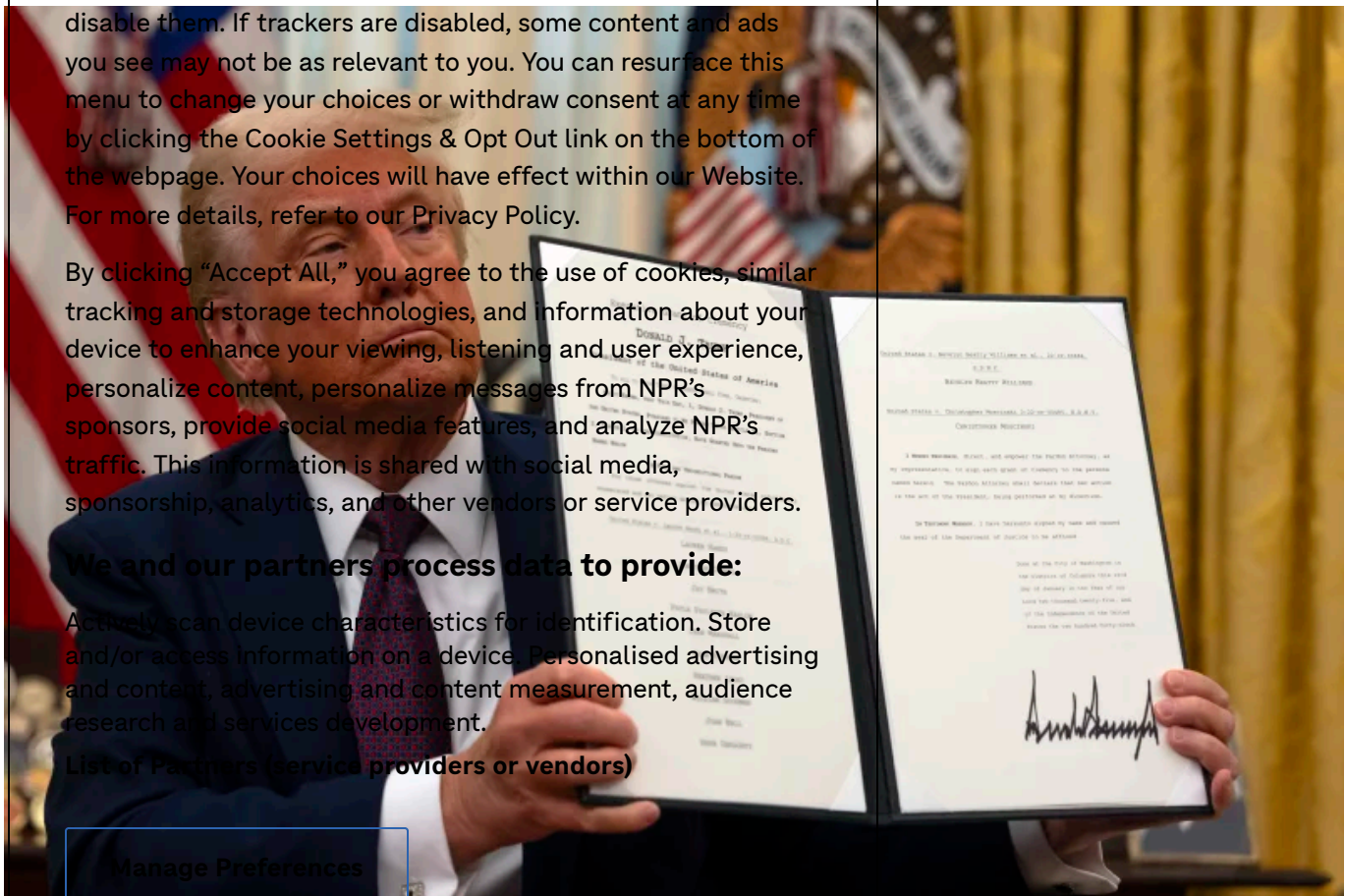
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President Trump holds up a signed executive order relating to clemency for anti-abortion protesters in the Oval Office in January.

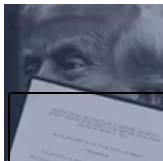
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President Trump this week pardoned former aide Rudy Giuliani, former White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows and many others accused of trying to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election.

It comes after recent clemency grants from Trump to former U.S. Rep. George Santos and an ex-CEO of a cryptocurrency exchange.



THE NPR POLITICS PODCAST

Early, often and without blowback: How President Trump is using pardons

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While former President Joe Biden still holds the record of 4,245 clemency actions, Trump's second-term pardons and commutations are notable for their political and personal connections to the president, says Bernadette Meyler, a professor of constitutional law at Stanford University.

"There's more of a sense of the insider pardon than we've seen previously," Meyler said.

In mid-October, Trump commuted the prison sentence of Santos, the disgraced New York Republican who pleaded guilty to wire fraud and identity theft last year.

Days later the president handed a full and unconditional pardon to Changpeng Zhao, the former CEO of Binance, who pleaded guilty to money laundering charges. Binance has ties to the Trump family's cryptocurrency business, but Trump said in an interview with 60 Minutes that he does not know who Zhao is.

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POLITICS

Trump defends his decision to pardon January 6 rioters

U.S. presidents are given broad authority to nullify convictions or sentences for federal crimes without the involvement of Congress or the Supreme Court. The legal principle is a holdover from English law, in which the king had what was known as the "prerogative of mercy" as early as the seventh century.

While Trump has granted clemency to a wide range of people convicted of federal crimes, from nonviolent drug offenders to white-collar criminals, his first term in office was also marked by several state pardons of political allies and grants of clemency to people whose cases were advocated for by celebrities or friends. Both of those trends have been amplified during his second term, Meyler said.



Former U.S. Rep. George Santos arrives at federal court in Central Islip, N.Y., for sentencing on April 25. His sentencing was commuted by Trump in October.

Julia Demaree Nikhinson/AP

"He's much more explicit about making political statements through the use of the pardon power," Meyler said of Trump's second-term pardons and commutations. She said that includes granting clemency for people who have supported his political career as well as public statements he's made about why a particular crime shouldn't be punished.

Trump's pardons align with his politics ...

Trump is by no means the first president to show leniency to a political ally.

President Bill Clinton pardoned Mark Rich, a former hedge-fund manager whose ex-wife had donated hundreds of thousands of dollars to the Democratic National Committee, the Clinton Presidential Library and Hillary Clinton's New York Senate campaign. And President George W. Bush commuted the sentence of Lewis

"Scooter" Libby, the former chief of staff to Vice President Dick Cheney.

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During his first four years in office, Trump pardoned his former campaign chairman, Paul Manafort, commuted the sentence of his friend and political confidant Roger Stone and pardoned Charles Kushner, the father of his son-in-law, Jared.

In his second term, Trump "has taken the same norm-busting approach to pardons as he has in other areas," Jeffrey Crouch, a professor of American politics at American University, told NPR via email.



NATIONAL

Trump voters call president's pardon of corrupt Virginia sheriff 'a terrific mistake'

Crouch pointed to Trump's move on inauguration day this year to pardon some 1,500 defendants (and commute the sentences of several others) convicted of taking part in the Jan. 6, 2021, siege on the U.S. Capitol in support of Trump's effort to overturn his electoral loss the previous fall. For comparison, Trump granted a total of 238 acts of clemency in his first term, according to the Pew Research Center.

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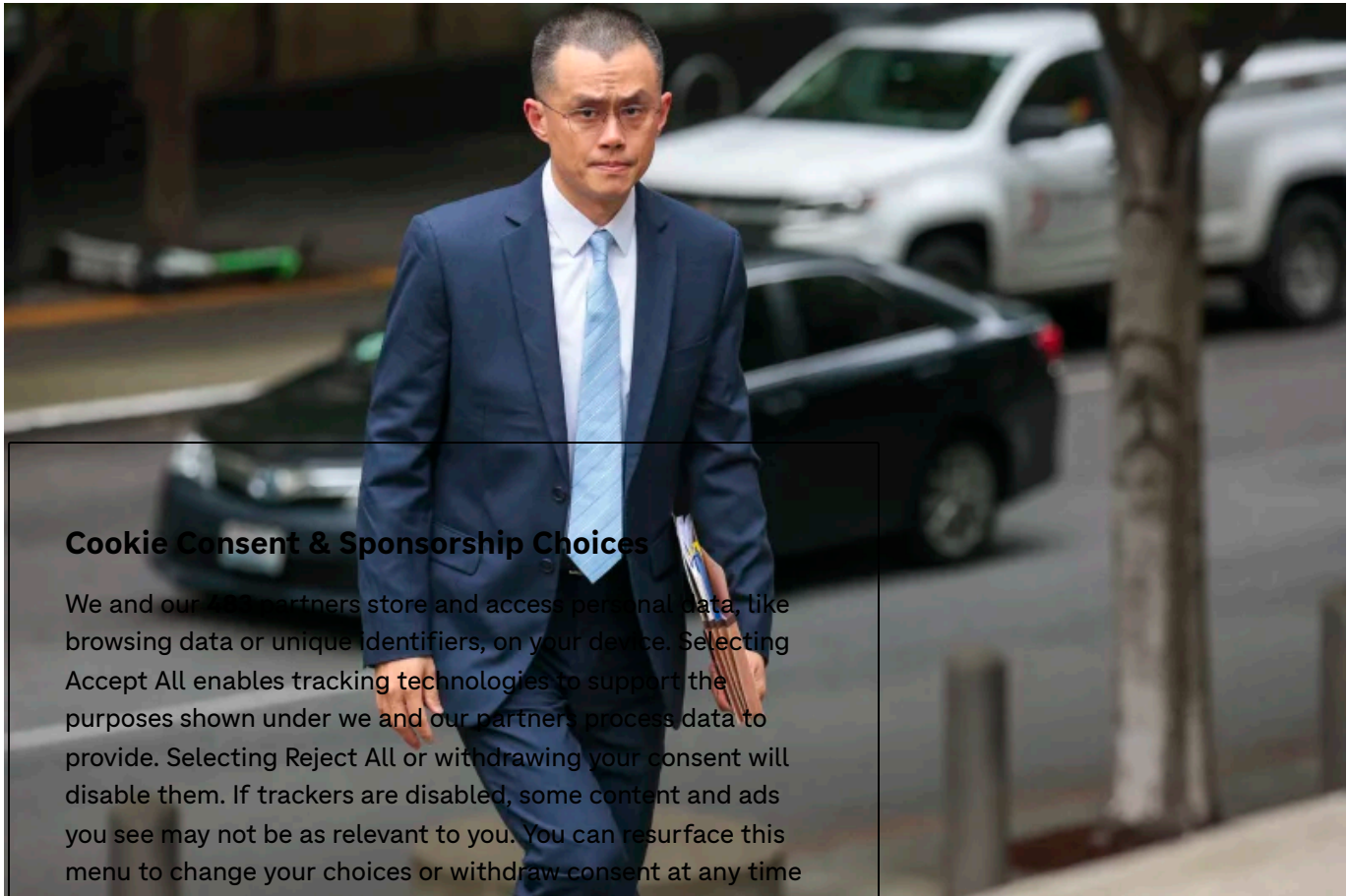
Crouch said many presidents have waited until the "lame duck" period at the end of their terms to issue potentially controversial clemency grants — but not Trump. "He did not shy away from granting early or controversial pardons and commutations in his first term, either."

Polines have always been entwined with the U.S. clemency process, but past presidents have often used pardons as a way to heal political divisions. George Washington pardoned some of those involved in the Whiskey Rebellion, while Jimmy Carter granted a blanket pardon to people who had evaded service in the Vietnam War.

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The Trump administration has used its authority to benefit some of its political backers. In May, Trump pardoned former Virginia Sheriff Scott Jenkins, an ardent Trump supporter, who was convicted of taking bribes from local businessmen in exchange for auxiliary deputy badges. The day the pardon was announced, U.S. Pardon Attorney Ed Martin posted on X: "No MAGA left behind." And when Trump pardoned Santos earlier this month, the president said on social media that Santos had the courage, conviction, and intelligence to ALWAYS VOTE REPUBLICAN!

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The founders envisioned impeachment as one check on what is otherwise a nearly absolute presidential power, but Trump has faced virtually no criticism from fellow Republicans for his pardons and commutations.

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Past presidents have also taken flak from voters for their clemency decisions.

Gerald Ford's approval rating fell by more than 20 points after he pardoned

Richard Nixon in 1974, and he lost the presidential election two years later to

Carter.

... and his political frustrations

While Santos and Jenkins are both Trump supporters, they also fall into another

category of criminal that comes up with some regularity in Trump's clemency

choices: public officials of both parties convicted of corruption.

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Trump in February issued a full pardon for former Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich,

after having commuted Blagojevich's prison sentence during his first term as

president. Former Cincinnati City Council member P.G. Sittenfeld received his own

pardon in May following his conviction on federal bribery and attempted extortion

charges in 2022. Both men are Democrats.

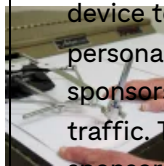
Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington said in June that Trump had

pardoned a total of 16 former elected officials convicted of corruption charges.

Meyler, the Stanford professor, said Trump, who has characterized his own recent

prosecutions as politically motivated, may view the cases of political corruption

against other politicians as similarly unjust.



POLITICS

Trump tries to void Biden's pardons, blaming autopopen. Many presidents have used it



Former Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich signs an autograph outside his Chicago home after speaking to the press about his pardon from President Trump in February. For more details, refer to our Privacy Policy.

Scott Olson/Getty Images North America

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 In an emailed statement to NPR, the White House contrasted Trump's approach to the clemency process with former President Joe Biden's, alluding to criticism from Trump and his allies over Biden's use of an autopen to issue pardons and sign other official documents. (In June, Trump ordered an investigation into Biden's use of the autopen.)

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"It's not difficult to be identified, or even in the pardon process when your predecessor was an autopen," said White House spokesperson Abigail Jackson. "President Trump has exercised his constitutional authority to issue pardons and commutations for a variety of individuals."

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NATIONAL

Trump pardons drug kingpins even as he escalates U.S. drug war rhetoric

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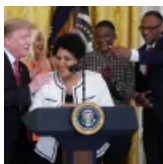
By clicking "Accept All," you agree to the use of cookies, similar tracking and storage technologies, and information about your device to enhance your viewing, listening and user experience, as well as Biden's commutations of 37 federal death row prisoners. Biden said he made those commutations due to his objections to capital punishment at the federal level — and his worry that Trump would lift the moratorium he put on federal executions.

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"And the only pardons anyone should be critical of are from President Autopen, who pardoned and commuted sentences of violent criminals including child killers and mass murderers — and that's not to mention the proactive pardons he 'signed' for his family members like Hunter on his way out the door," Jackson added.

What is the clemency process under Trump? Getting his ear may help

Though it's not the only path to securing a pardon or commutation, the official process for seeking clemency is to submit a formal application to the U.S. pardon attorney.



NATIONAL

Who is Alice Marie Johnson, Trump's newly appointed 'pardon czar'?

Martin, the current pardon attorney, was appointed by Trump after the president withdrew his nomination to be the U.S. Attorney for the District of Columbia in the face of Republican opposition. The Trump administration fired the former pardon attorney, Liz Oyer, in March after she refused to restore the gun rights of actor and Trump supporter Mel Gibson, who had been convicted of domestic violence.

Mark Oster, a law professor at the University of St. Thomas, said it's unclear where the formal process is currently resulting in a clemency grants in any significant numbers. "Right now we know that there's still a mailbox, and that there are petitions going into that mailbox," he said. "What we don't know is what happens after that."

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In 2018, Trump commuted the sentence of Alice Marie Johnson, after she served 21 years in prison for cocaine trafficking. He later pardoned Johnson and made her his "pardon czar."

Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images North America

Osler said concerns about the clemency application process — or lack thereof — predated Trump's second term. He said Biden also issued pardons to political allies and personal connections he thought Trump may target, including his son Hunter.

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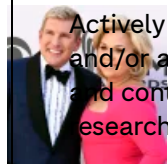
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"So those norms were being strained and broken before Trump took office, but he certainly has continued that trend," he said.

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Osler, who runs a clinic where he and his students file petitions for people seeking clemency, said it's raising questions among those seeking clemency about their odds of success by following the traditional path to obtain a pardon or commutation.

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Trump pardons Todd and Julie Chrisley, the reality TV couple convicted of fraud.

"I think people are focusing very much on how upset they are about who's receiving grants," he said. "But we need to focus as well on who's not getting grants — those people who have done a long term in prison, who have rehabilitated themselves, often done incredible things in prison. And they're being ignored in their plea for mercy."

Trump appointed Alice Johnson as his "pardon czar" in February. Johnson was pardoned for a nonviolent drug offense by Trump during his first term after her story got the attention and advocacy of celebrities such as Kim Kardashian.

Johnson said she was going to "fight for those who are still incarcerated, who don't have a voice like I have right now." She told Fox News in May that she'd sent more than 100 clemency petitions to the White House and "over 46 people really were able to get a second chance in life."

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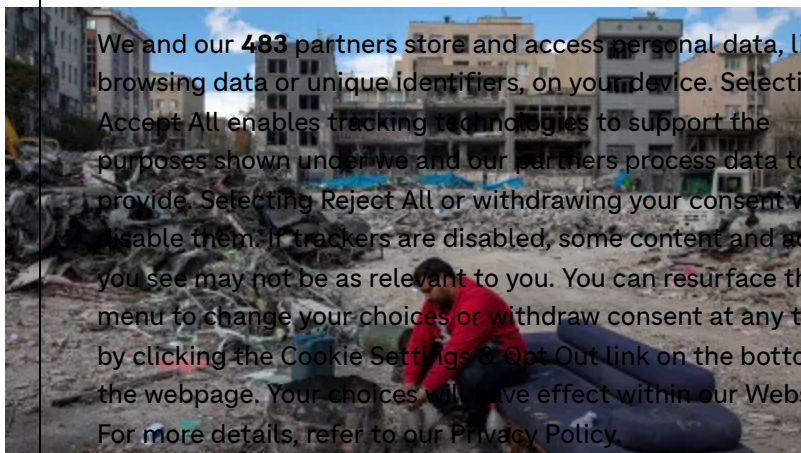
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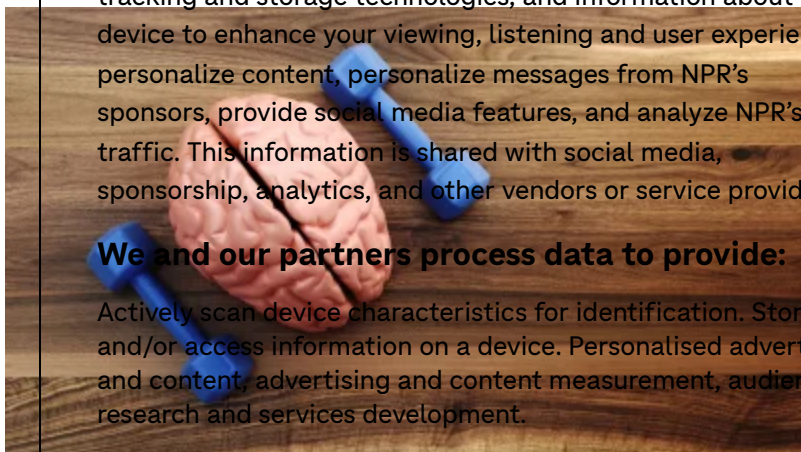
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U.S. and Iran agree to 2-week ceasefire, suspending Trump's threat to annihilate Iran



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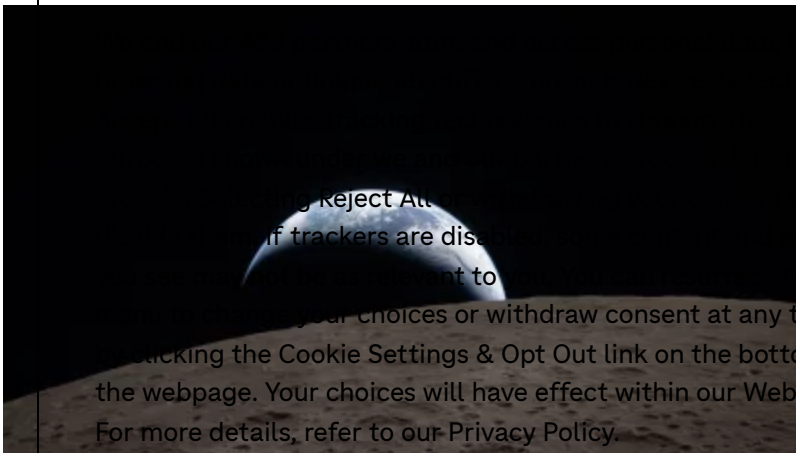
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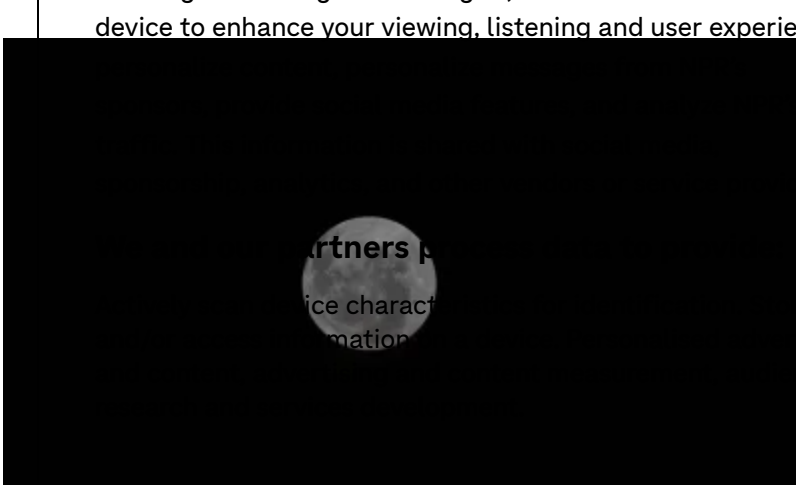
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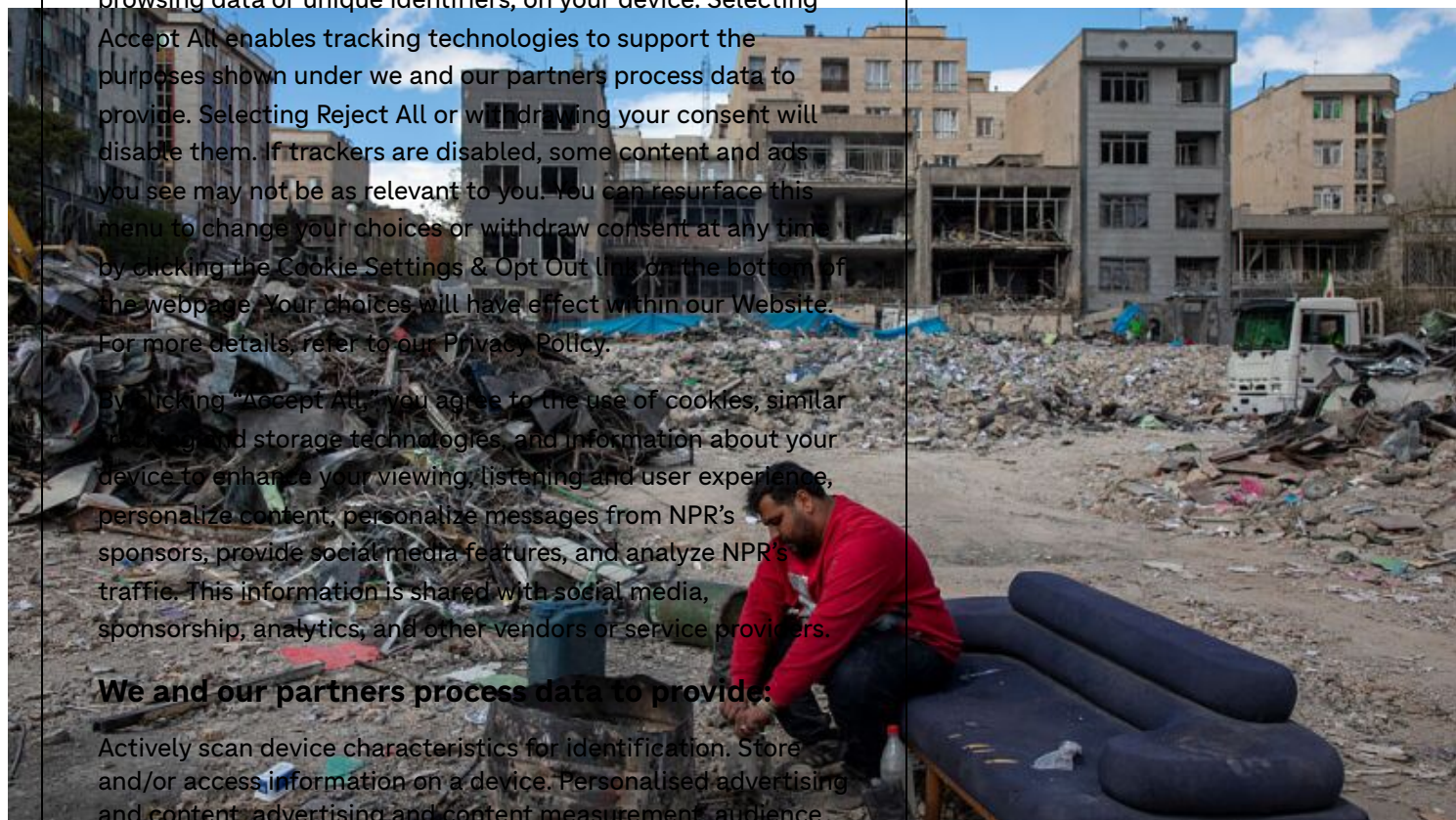
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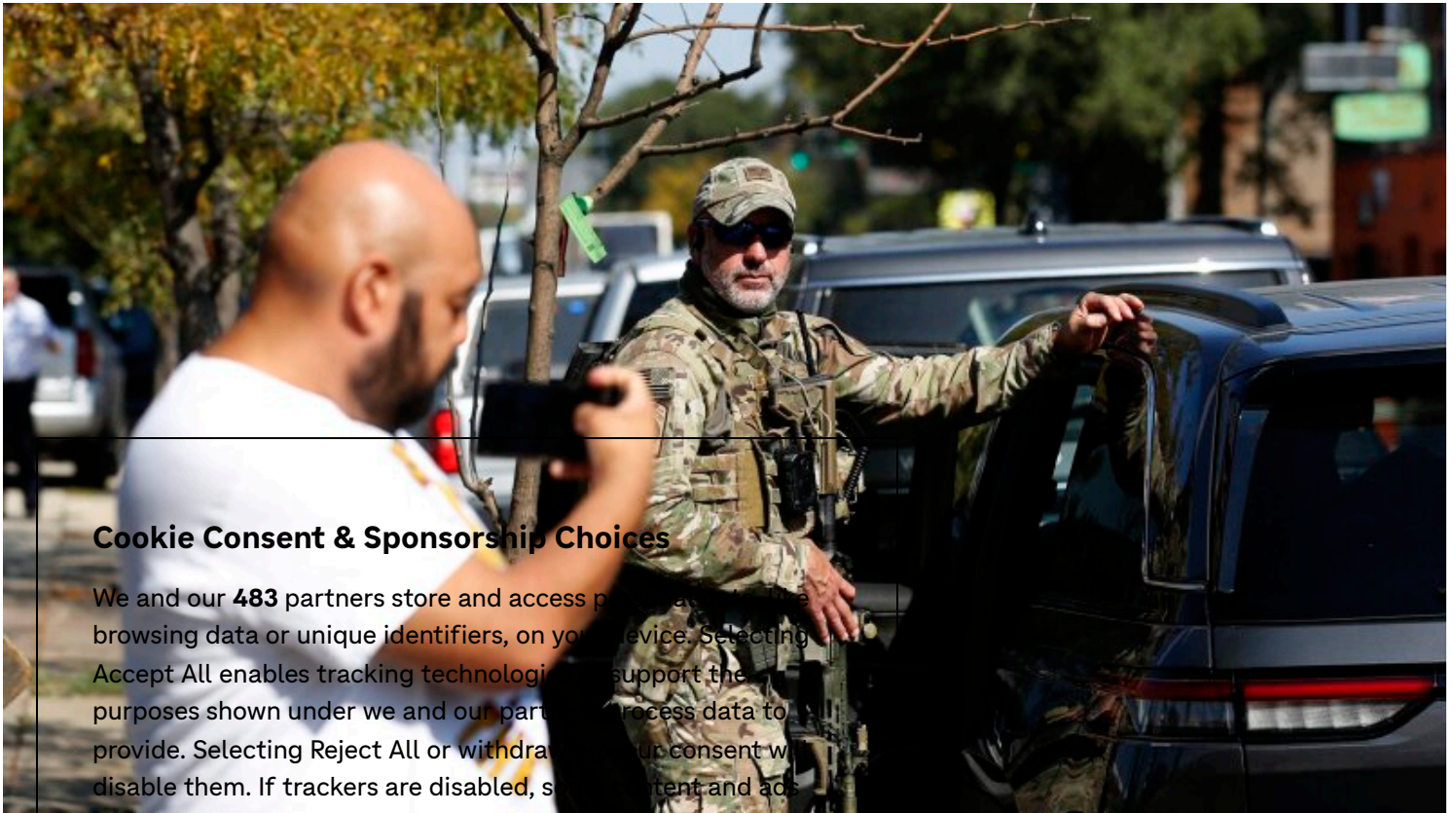
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U.S. and Iran agree to 2-week ceasefire, suspending Trump's threat to annihilate Iran





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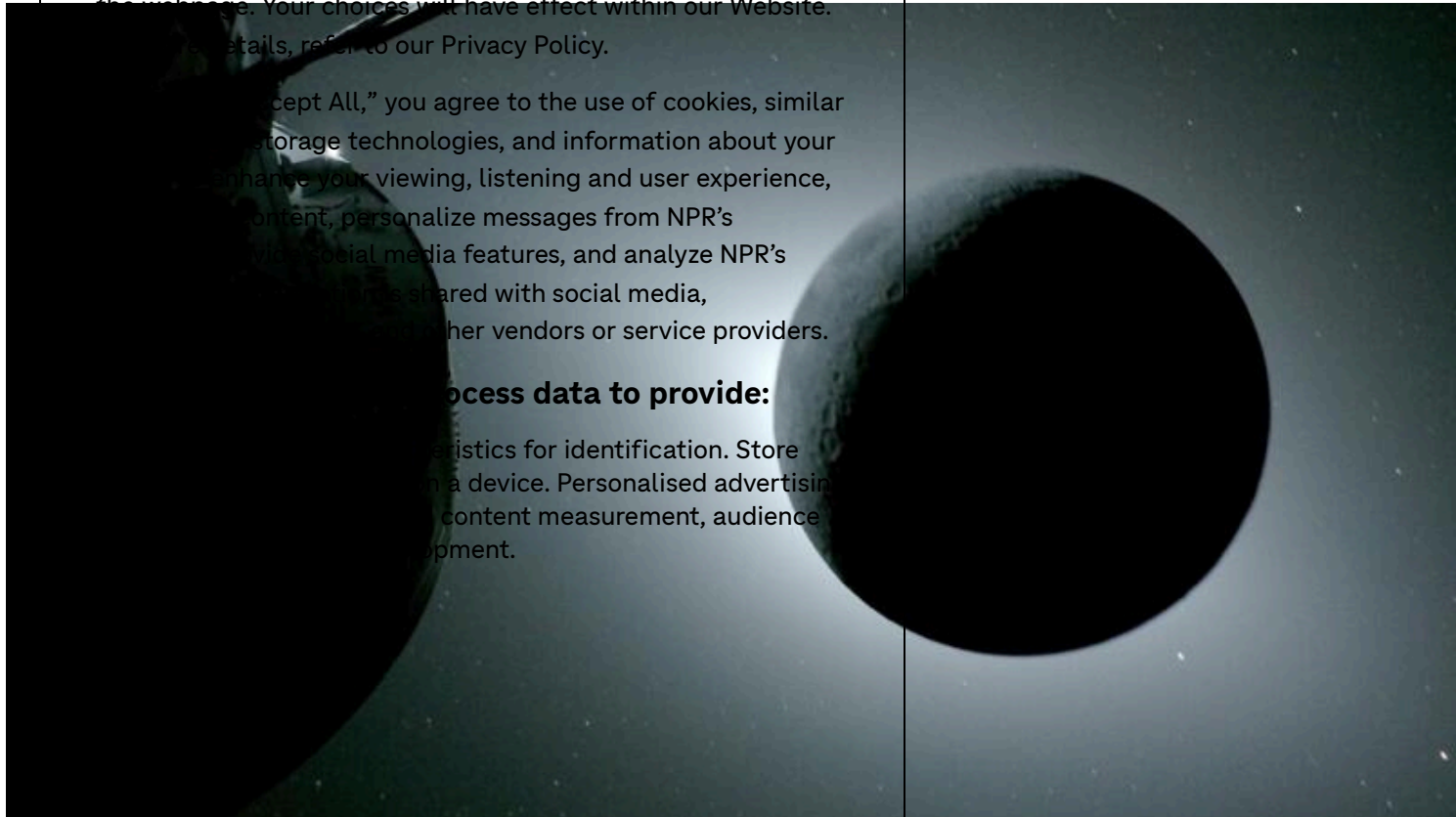
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SPACE

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THE PICTURE SHOW

Photos: NASA releases first images from moon flyby

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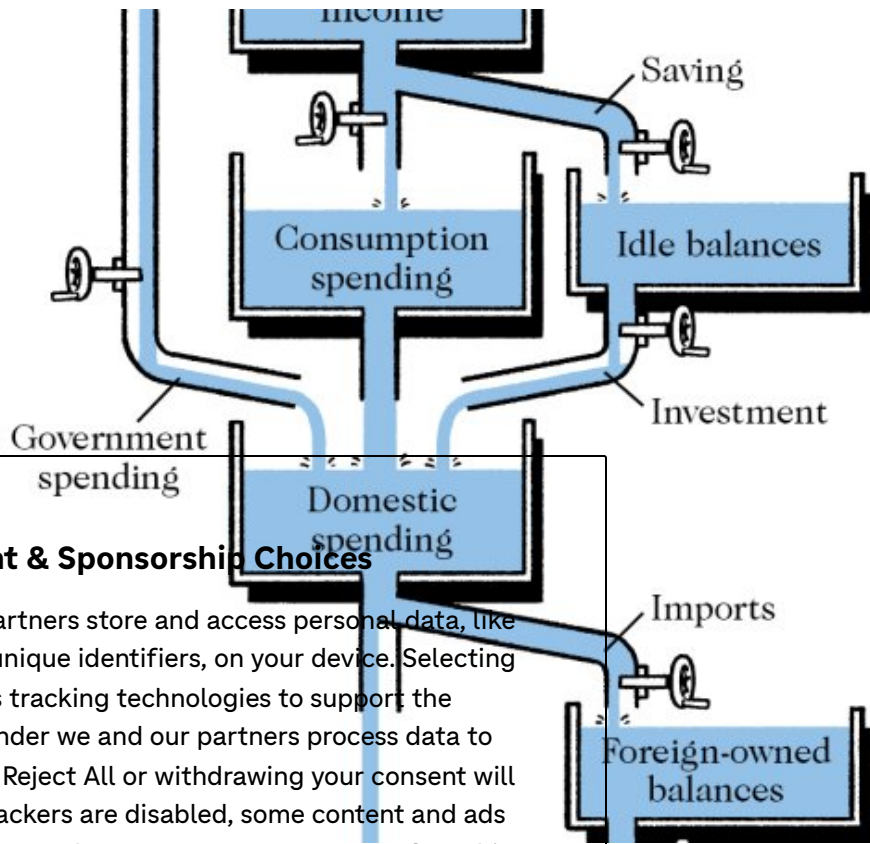
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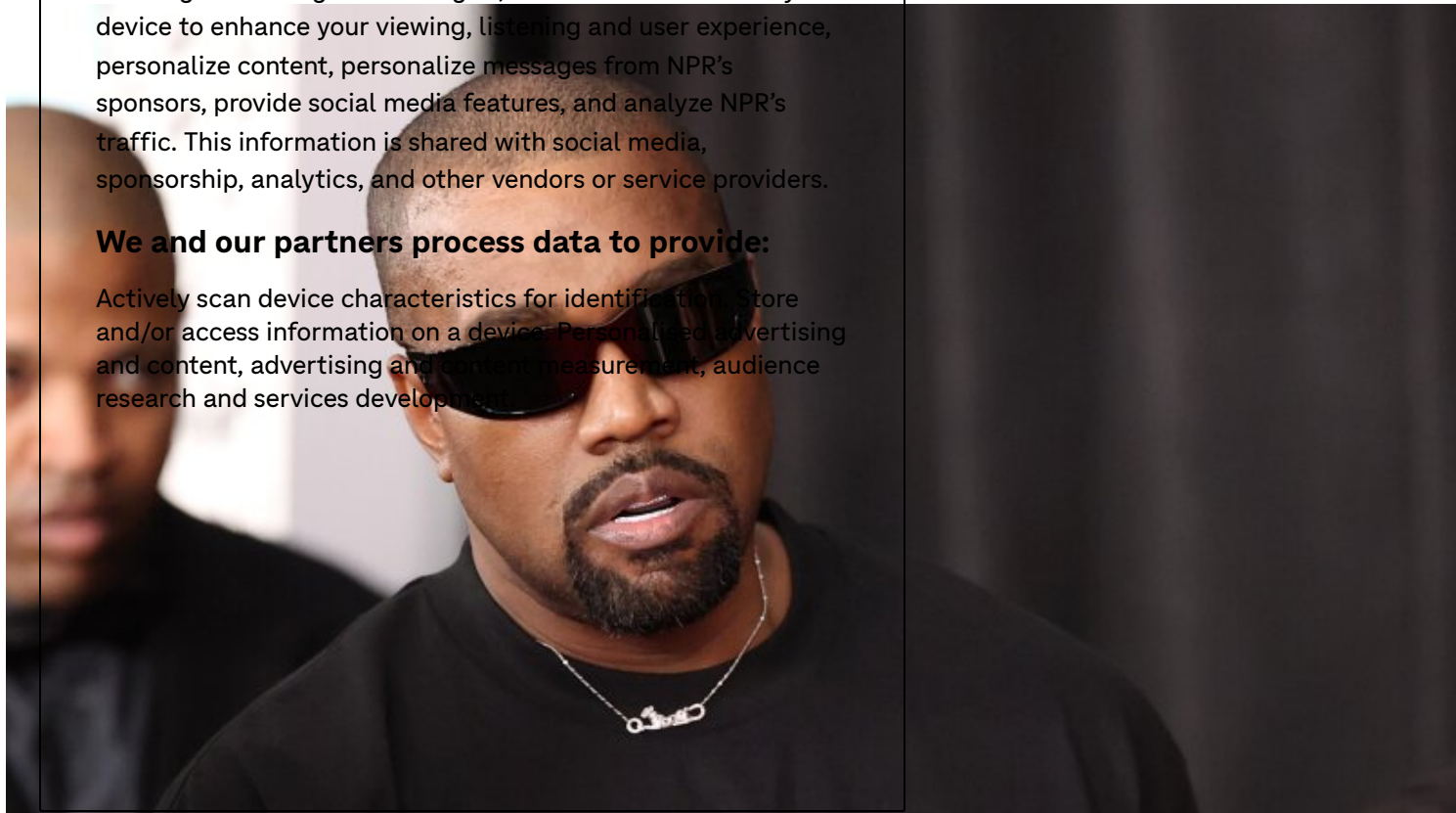
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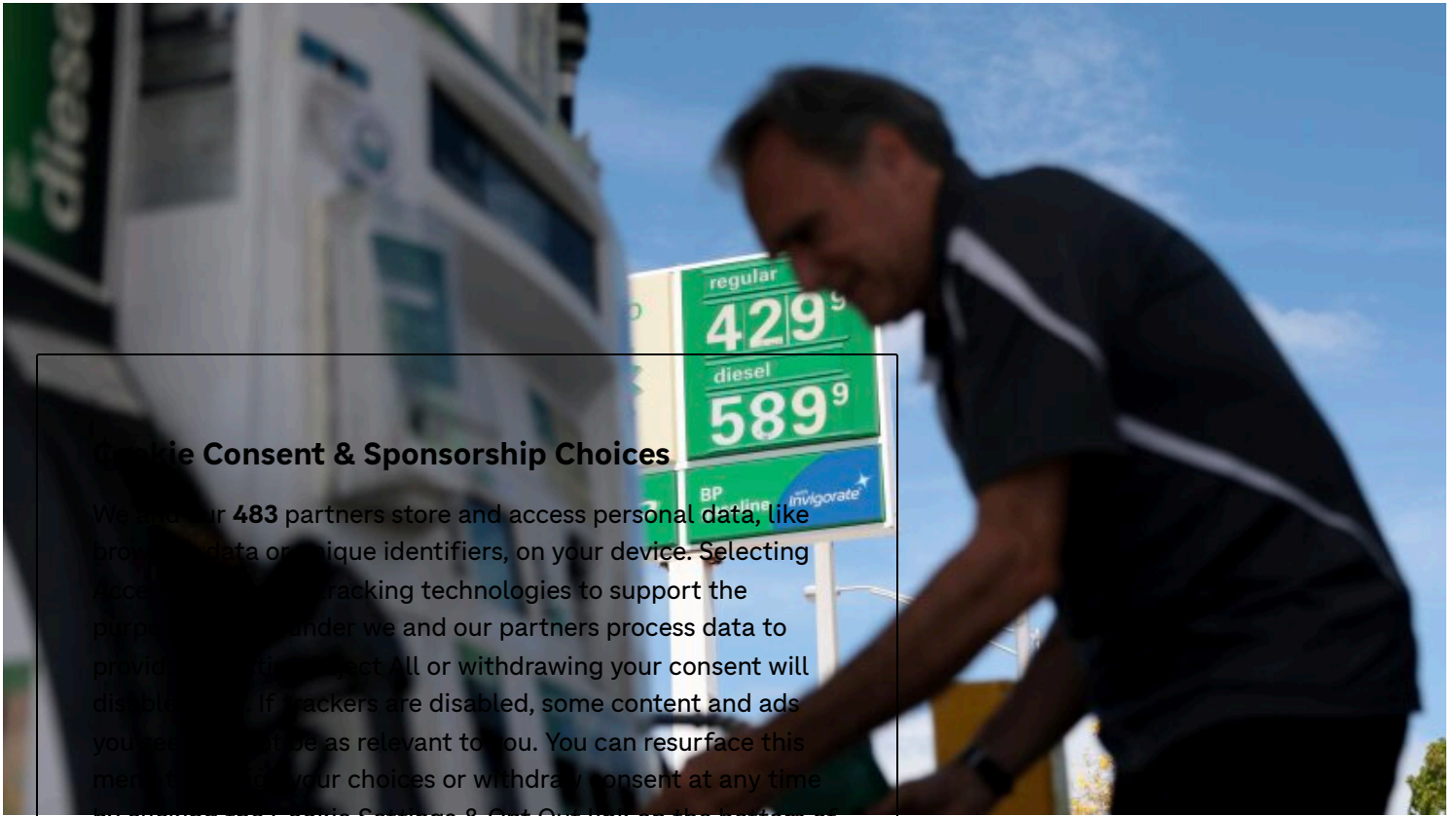
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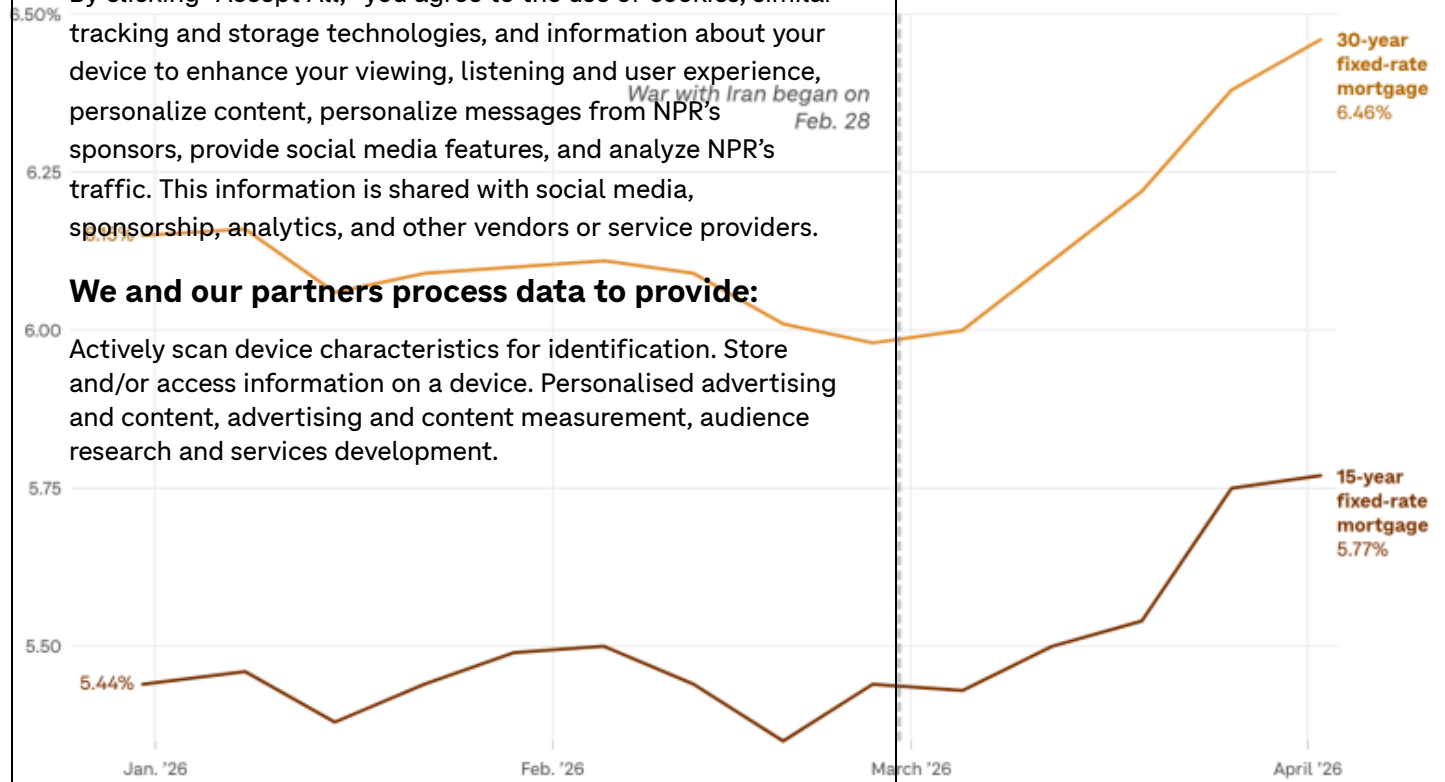
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