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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR ERIC ADAMS DELIVERS REMARKS AT THE NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

Jen Judson, President of the National Press Club: All right, good afternoon and welcome to the National Press Club, the place where news happens. I'm Jen Judson and I am the 115th president of the National Press Club and land warfare reporter for Defense News. Thank you to both those attending here in person and those joining us via the web. Before we begin, a couple of housekeeping items. For those in the room that would like to submit a question for our guest following his remarks, please use the index cards that are available around the room and pass them to Kate over here. And please keep the questions short and write legibly or submit a question via email by sending it to headliners@press.org and put NYC in the subject line.

Having a leading role in national policy debates comes with the territory for anyone holding the elected office currently occupied by our guest today. As leader of America's largest city, the mayor of New York's policies, programs, and opinions carry weight, not only here at home, but often in minds around the globe that view New York City as a symbol of all that is good and bad about the United States of America.

For Eric Adams — Eric Adams has served his hometown as a street cop, first for the New York City Transit Police and then for the New York City Police Department, spending over 20 years in law enforcement, before retiring as a captain. Mayor Adams career then continued at the elected level as he served as a New York State senator representing Brooklyn, then as Brooklyn borough president before being elected mayor, taking office at the beginning of the year.

Gun control has dominated the mayor's time in recent months. With the full support of Mayor Adams, the state of New York recently passed legislation designed to address illegal gun crime, entitled the Concealed Carry Improvement Act. Among other elements, the new law required enhanced training and background checks for those seeking a new carry permit and strictly prohibits the carrying of any permitted firearm in many public spaces, including public transit, places of worship, restaurants and bars, government buildings, and other spaces. Those violating are subject to a felony charge. Thus, Times Square and its hundreds of thousands of daily visitors has now been declared a gun free zone along with many, many other locations in New York state. To expand on this, it is my pleasure to welcome to the National Press Club, the 110th mayor of the City of New York, the honorable Eric Adams. Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Eric Adams: I used to look at this prestigious place, National Press Club, for many years. I don't know if you folks are familiar with the old sitcom, but right now I feel like George Jefferson, moving on up. (Laughter.) Thank you. Thank you so much, Jen, and thank all of you for taking the time out to come and embark on a conversation that is dear to my heart. I'm also joined here by my Correction commissioner, Commissioner Molina. I'm happy to have him in the audience with me as we deal with both ends of the crisis that I believe is facing America, and that's the over-proliferation of guns. It's not a New York problem. It's a national problem that's impacting every major city in our country.

As indicated, My name is Eric Adams. I'm the mayor of the City of New York, a former police officer, 22 years. I retired as a captain and I am a legal gun owner. I believe in the right of Americans to carry guns legally and in a responsible way. I like to say that those responsible Americans do it for the recreation part of it and do it because it is part of our culture. And I'm sure when the founding fathers gave us those rights, they were not thinking of AK-47s.

We should be clear, as I stand here at the National Press Club, my most defining mission as the mayor of the City of New York, largest city in America, is to focus on ending gun violence and stopping the scourge of illegal guns. I have seen the destruction of gun violence up close. My first month in office, we witnessed the assassination of two of our police officers, Officer Rivera and Officer Mora. But it was not only that. Night after night, stopping at hospitals, visiting families, seeing the horrific wounds, the shattered lives, the grieving members. No one was immune from this violence, from 11-month-old babies shot in the Bronx to innocent bystanders being shot by guns.

When the bullet leaves the barrel of the gun, it does not discriminate and it does not stop emotionally after it hits its target. It rips apart the anatomy of our city and the victims live with this violence on and on. The bodies of our children in open caskets happens too often. The sea of blood of blue, outside the St. Patrick cathedral, as we say goodbye to our fallen officers. I've talked with these families, prayed with them, mourned with them, and stood with them. And every time I see and go through this, we as New Yorkers are experiencing PTSD, as well as the other cities in our country. It breaks my heart, not just because it is so tragic, but because it has become so common. We've normalized violence in our city. We've normalized the number of deaths. We've normalized hearing the number of people who are the victims of violence.

It is happening all over this country, from Chicago, to San Francisco, to Atlanta, to New York. In our schools, our supermarkets — like in Buffalo, New York — at our parades, at our celebrations, at our weddings. No matter where we are, we're finding gun violence is following us. It's a national shame and it's a national crisis, but this crisis does not have to happen, and it is not an accident.

It started in a meeting room, a boardroom, a memo, a marketing plan that clearly stated, "We want to sell more guns." And the question was how? "How are we going to accomplish the task of selling our product as much as possible?" In other words, it started with greed. It started with profit like the tobacco industry and the opioid manufacturers before them. Gun companies took a dangerous product and marketed it to the masses. They use aggressive marketing to reach new consumers, including those who have no business carrying a gun, irresponsible people, underage people, criminals. Those who are abusers.

The goal was to put guns in the hands of as many people as possible, all to generate profit at any cost. Their plan succeeded beyond our wildest imaginations. The gun industry rakes in \$9 billion a year, but America has paid the price with blood. The cost is more gun violence on our street and in our homes. Increased hate crimes, deadlier domestic violence, higher rates of suicide, more fallen officers, more fearful elders and more school shooters, over and over again.

This is a business that will stop at nothing, not even the donor or the loss of lives. And we don't stop at the doors of elementary school. Just to keep making money. This is a business that has built in a business plan that is not just a business model, this is a blood sacrifice. We must fight for our lives and our children, not with weapons, but with the fierce light of truth. The message I want to share with you today. We must expose the lies of gun industry and their lobbyists of the NRA the same way we expose the lies of the tobacco industry and opioid manufacturers.

Their greed and irresponsible business practices have fueled the gun violence epidemic in this nation, and they have used the power of their profits to shield themselves from accountability at every turn, spending millions to buy influence and change laws to protect themselves from legal action. If the law did not protect the gun industry, we'll be able to learn about how they have decided to market directly to children, resisted common sense safety technology to preserve profits, and knowingly develop products that are easier to conceal from law enforcement. As a former police officer, I understood the increased damage our first responders risk every day. I see it every day. And as a gun owner, I know that responsible gun owners are not the problem. Sportsmen, hunters, collectors are not the people who are driving the epidemic of violence. Many of them support common sense gun responsibility, and the laws that comes with it just as the majority of Americans — people do. The blame lies with those in positions of power at gun companies.

They profit from products that end up in the hands of criminals. They cover up their role in the deaths of innocent victims. They spend millions to mislead the public, create doubt, and shift blame. And at every turn, they block the industry reforms in legal solution that could save lives. And now on behalf of every mayor, every victim of gun violence, and every American, I'm asking for your help to expose a gun industry in this country for what it truly is, a betrayal of American values in American freedom. A factory of fear that empties directly into the sea of violence, a premeditated approach to selling guns. A predatory industry that must be changed to protect American lives in the same way of those who have killed in the memory of those who pass the tobacco industry and the opioid industry.

We need the free press of a free nation to tell the story of how the gun industry has betrayed America. How the civilian firearm industry went from supplying hunters with rifles to marketing violence as a lifestyle. How traditional American values, like independence and courage, were warped into a narrative of dominance and brute force. So many of you in the media have already done an extraordinary job. Your work is commendable. You have often put your personal safety aside to do so. And in some cases, many of you have been the victim of this violence, but we must go bigger, higher, and fight harder. Every story you cover about gun violence can help us move closer to accountability for those who profit from it. And when we cover gun violence in the firearm industry, we need to make sure we do three important things.

One, name the gun. Two, follow the money. Three, debunk the myths. Let's start with naming the gun. By now, we're all familiar with the stories of gun violence. The shooter's name, his age,

his grievances, his background, his victims. Maybe we learned about the victims' families, their communities, their classmates. What is often left out is the kind of weapon used and how he got it. Was it a Daniel Defense AR-15 bought at a gun show or a Polymer 80 ghost gun assembled from a kit? A Sig Sauer or a Springfield Armory Hellcat? A Smith & Wesson M&P or a Mossberg 590 Shockwave? That's the first step we must do. We must name the gun.

Every gun, every time, every crime. Cui bono. Latin phrase. That's where every lawyer begins the case. What stands and who stands to gain from this. Clearly not the American people. Just like tobacco and opioids, those who profit avoid the spotlight and cover their tracks. The gun industry has fought hard to shield itself from accountability. They have distanced themselves from the harm that their product produces and attempted to shut down the entire conversation around gun violence, but it becomes harder when we know the name of the gun and the name of the company who made it.

Step two, follow the money. When a gun crime is committed, we need the name of the gun and how the gun was obtained by the shooter. We look the other way, and we can't do that anymore. Who is that shooter? And that shooter cannot pretend they were not aware and the seller of that gun. When it was bought, how it was bought, who profited from the sale — when we follow the money, this is how you get to the heart of the story. Gun violence is no exception. Guns don't magically appear or drop from the skies. They don't just come on our scene or into our communities. Guns are made and marketed with the express purpose of generating profits.

Guns are sold without any concern for where they end up or who lives are taken. Guns cause over 40,000 deaths a year in America and gun violence is the leading cause of death of our children. And every turn, the gun companies spread misinformation and deflect blame. I have often spoken about the many rivers that feed the sea of violence. We must go upstream and dam each river of violence. And we must find the sources to dam them correctly. That means investigating the supply chain, the players, the men behind the market, the gun manufacturers and distributors and their enablers must be named and shamed. Every CEO, every board member, every significant investor should have their name associated with the story of gun violence in America. It is a travesty that we know the places where our citizens and children were murdered, but not the names of the CEOs who approved the marketing of the weapons that were used to kill them.

People like Marty Daniel, CEO of Daniel Defense, the makers of the gun used to kill at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde. Or Ron Cohen, president CEO of Sig Sauer, makers of the gun used to kill 49 people at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando and 60 people at a music festival in Las Vegas. Our people like Christopher Killoy, president and CEO of Sturm, Ruger & Company, makers of the weapon used by the killer who murdered 26 people at Baptist Church in Sutherland Springs, Texas. And Mark Smith, president and CEO of Smith & Wesson, makers of the gun used to kill parade goers on the 4th of July in Highland Park, Illinois.

Just as the families were exposed, who were behind the opioid epidemic — the source of the crisis — we need the media to define who's responsible for the crisis of gun violence. We need you. Gun companies must be covered in that same way that we covered the opioid crisis. Industry practices must be subject to public scrutiny at every level. Their marketing must be analyzed and their methods must be exposed. Gun companies routinely pursue unethical

marketing practices that invite aggressive use of their products and promote antisocial and harmful messaging that promote violence.

Remington's notorious "Consider Your Man Card Reissued" marketing campaign is a prime example — and the media was instrumental in calling them out, leading to a \$73 million settlement with Remington's insurers. Every firm and agency who has been paid to shamelessly market guns, promote the tactical lifestyle, or mislead the public must be called out and held accountable. In addition to covering the industry's executive decision makers and marketing partners must also unmask the investors who profit.

Let me conclude with this. We have to question those who were hired to evade responsibility, and we must expose all the ways that the gun industry externalize their costs onto the American people. If you take one fact away, as I indicated, the industry makes \$9 billion a year, but it costs the American people \$557 billion a year to pay for the toll of gun violence. According to a report compiled by Everytown For Gun Safety, the average annual cost for overall gun violence in the United States is \$1,698 per person. The Robb Elementary School massacre in Uvalde, Texas cost an estimated \$244.2 million, all of which \$10.2 million were borne by taxpayers. American taxpayers paid \$30.16 million every day in police and criminal justice costs for investigation, prosecution, and incarceration. And that doesn't even begin to factor in the cost of human lives and human suffering. Millions of our hard-earned money has been spent to outsource our safety and to protect us from guns. Money that could be used to build affordable housing, provide healthcare, hire more teachers. The gun companies are bleeding our country dry. It's time the true course of gun violence is splashed across every media outlet in the nation. The data on gun deaths, gun crime and gun sales must be investigated, uncovered and made clear to every American. We need the media to actively debunk the myths the gun industry spreads to obscure the truth.

The gun industry relies on the finely-honed fiction that evil is some naturally occurring force that is beyond human control and the only way to deal with violence is with more violence. They push the false narrative, like more guns equal more self safety. "There's no point in gun laws, because murderers will always find a way to kill." And the worst one of all, "the only way to stop a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun." They tell us these myths to keep us from realizing the truth: gun violence is a man-made crisis. A toxic waste spill that profit from the American people on a daily basis. Evil is not some unnatural occurrence that inevitably manifests itself in violence. Hate can be taught. Fear can be monetized. And violence can be marketed. The culture of greed and selfishness can be promoted and those who engage in this can make a lot of money and they are making a lot of money on the American people.

And so we are calling on you, as the police will continue to do their job in New York City. We removed [5,000] illegal guns off our streets this year alone. And our city fields file a landmark lawsuit against the online retailers of ghost guns. Three of these companies have already settled. We want to allow the ATF to share information instead of withholding information. And what you're seeing is clear, our lawmakers on both sides of the aisle are identifying the need of responsible gun laws, President Biden, Chuck Schumer and others — members of the city in congressional delegation.

My friends in the media, Americas need you now more than ever. You did it before during the tobacco crisis. You did it before during the opioid crisis. We need it now. The only thing more

powerful than the Second Amendment in this country is the First Amendment. The story is right here. Story of greed, a story of corruption, a story of hypocrisy and we need your help to tell the story before we pull more bodies out of the sea of violence. Let's take our country up extreme and prevent the violence. Thank you very much.

Judson: Thank you so much for those remarks.

Mayor Adams: Thank you.

Judson: We're going to dive right into questions because I know you have a hard stop. So I was going to ask you to imagine a world where your background and your experience allowed you to address gun violence in any way that you see fit and what are the three things that you would do. I think you did that a little bit in your remarks. So talk about what are the roadblocks to this right now. Where are you getting stuck in trying to implement some of these things like, name the gun, follow the money. Where does it become challenging?

Mayor Adams: The matching of two places and both of them are three letters, NRA, ATF. We have really gotten in the way of ATF of even sharing information. Information sharing so we can trace where the guns are coming from and identifying those who are feeding this sea of violence. This is a small number of people throughout the country who are profiting from this. If we allow the ATF to do its job, it could inform local municipalities and law enforcement agencies. We could share information and we could identify that flow. But the NRA has a strong lobbying group and it's unfortunate that there's some lawmakers who have decided to put profit over public safety.

Judson: Okay. Should bail reform laws be altered so that gun crime charges are treated radically different than others?

Mayor Adams: Yes. And we have continuously showed how parts of the bail reform law must be modified for the small number of repeated offenders. When you do an analysis, the bail reform law is something that I supported as a state lawmaker. 90 percent of the people who benefit from the reforms were not incarcerating people for long periods of time. But you have 10 percent who are exploiting those laws and they're violent offenders. We specifically drilled down on those who are using guns. And then we have to unbottleneck our court system. That is another part that is often ignored.

Judson: Okay. Given that stop and frisk tactics have been rejected by the courts, how do you enforce concealed carry laws in your new gun free zones?

Mayor Adams: It's going to be really challenging and stop, question, and frisk is still a tool that is allowed to use. If an officer reasonably suspects someone has committed a crime, he has the ability to stop them, question them, and if you believe that person is carrying a weapon, he has the ability to frisk them. That stays in place. That has not changed. What we have done in New York City is we do not abuse that authority by throwing a wide net out and saying we are just going to stop people based on their zip code and their ethnicity. That was the abuse of stop and frisk but it's still in place. But we do have a challenge because now in New York City you look at someplace like Times Square, 475,000 people could be in Times Square on any given day. If you

just take a fraction of them that are carrying guns legally, someone hears a gunshot, everyone responds. So we can turn our cities into Dodge City instead of New York City.

Judson: Great. You're a former cop and now mayor of the entire city. How does enforcement of so-called quality of life crimes square with the issue that doing so can result in mass incarceration of people of color?

Mayor Adams: Quality of life is not a trade off. Public safety and justice, they are the prerequisite to our prosperity. We must be safe as a city. What we did in our city in previous years, we eroded the things that allowed us to become one of the safest big cities in America and that's quality of life. You can't have a city where anything and everything goes. Where people can walk into a store and steal whatever they want inside the store and walk out or jump the turnstile. We learned back during the mid-80s, when I was a police officer, that that person who jumped the turnstile was going on the system to commit a crime. And oftentimes we caught people who were avoiding payment of their fare to find that they were carrying guns.

So when you create an environment where illegal dirt bikes are on your streets clogging up the roadway, stopping crossings and highways, or people openly injecting themselves with drugs on our streets in front of our children. When you create that environment of anything and everything goes in your city, you're going to see the erosion of the quality of life of every day New Yorkers and every day Americans.

I'm seeing the erosion of quality of life all over this country. We played out in Portland, where a city was built in a city, that the police was not allowed to go into. That's unacceptable. And once you start dismantling basic respect that we owe each other as neighbors, it continues to escalate. This is a country and New York is a city of law and order, not unlawfulness and disorder.

Judson: Okay. Does New York, where the Statue of Liberty sits in the harbor and generations of immigrants have passed through, do you have special obligation to care for those immigrants?

Mayor Adams: Yes we do, because we all are immigrants. We all came from somewhere. And if someone ever tells an immigrant to go back to the country they came from the immigrants just say, "I will after you go back to the country you came from." Every one of us came from somewhere. But we need to be responsible in doing so and that's on many levels. Number one, we need to vet who's coming into our country because there's some people that have dangerous tendencies and we cannot erode our homeland security.

Number two, there should be a pathway to allow them to housing and understand the American way of life, educate the children, do it in a very humane fashion. What is taking place in Texas right now with Governor Abbott is despicable. It is anti to everything we are as an American. I'm sure if he was to trace back his lineage, he'll see that he came from somewhere. I think that it's imperative during crisis, you coordinate. He did not pick up the phone. He did not coordinate. Every city that passed by arriving to New York, he should have communicated with and we should have worked out a coordination. And we have to share this issue of what's happening on our border and we have an obligation to be responsible. Because that's who we are as America, but we have to do it in a responsible way.

Judson: Okay. Goes to my next question on how you feel about the migrants being sent to New York from Texas and Arizona? What do you think is a federal obligation to help cities like New York and Washington as we deal with this?

Mayor Adams: There's a couple of things we should do. I think it's imperative that we look at the employment. Think about this for a moment. We're telling migrants and asylum seekers, "You can come to the country but for six months you can't work." What? Six months you can't work. So six months you are having people who just sit idly by, waiting. So who's supposed to pick up the tab for that? If the federal government is saying that for six months you can't work, then the federal government should be saying for six months we going to compensate you. Because someone has to pay for that.

And it's also just not fair. The strange thing is, particularly in New York and across the country, there's such a demand for need of employees. Many of my industries are dying to get employees. So if you are a nurse from Venezuela, why am I having you sit down and not be using your medical profession to help in the hospitals that we have a shortage of nurses. If you are an engineer, we have a shortage of engineers. If you are a teacher, we have a shortage of teachers, bilingual teachers. So that six months delay is creating a bigger crisis.

Judson: Okay. Very good point. How big a difference has COVID made in terms of crime in New York and what are the special challenges in trying to prevent and deal with COVID related crime?

Mayor Adams: Mental health. COVID, I'm pretty sure when we do a revision of this moment that we are going to realize that COVID did something to our mental health crisis that we were facing pre-COVID, but it has really aggravated. Many of our mental health beds were closed or removed because of the COVID. And we never regained those beds. Isolation. Many of our seniors that were living alone, some of the health crisis that we're facing is living alone, loneliness. Many European countries have identified that loneliness is a real crisis. The number one crisis we're facing. When you look in our subway systems, when we look at our street homelessness, many people with mental health. I don't know exactly how many of those numbers came from COVID, but COVID created a real mental health crisis that's spilled into some of the violence that you're seeing on our streets.

Judson: Okay. I'm going to turn to some questions from my cards. When do you expect the report on education standards in private schools from the Department of Education to be completed? When was the last time you toured a Yeshiva? The NYC City Council is moving forward its bill to ban solitary confinement. Will you sign the bill? So two separate questions here on this card. It's rapid fire, running out of time.

Mayor Adams: Let me deal with the solitary confinement. I have the commissioner of Corrections here. Someone slashed me with a knife on the street. I put him in jail. I remove him from the population because he's dangerous. Someone slashes someone inside a jail, what do I do with him? I move him from population and I put him someplace by himself until he corrects his actions or gets the assistance he needs. So what the City Council is saying, if someone slashes someone in jail, you do nothing with him. You can leave him in that same population. Well, if they believe that, then tell me don't arrest anyone for slashing someone on the street. You can't

have it both ways. So we have people in jail who are sexually assaulting employees. 80 percent of the people who they attack are other inmates.

So if we want to leave dangerous people in the general population of the jail, then we should leave dangerous people in the general population of society. The fearful part about that, some of them believe that. Some of them believe why should we put people in jail at all? So I say, "Why don't we put them on your block? You want to house them, house them in your home." No, this is silly. People who assault or commit a crime while in jail should be removed from population in a humane way. And that's what this commissioner has done. They should be removed so they are not harmful to themselves and harmful to others. And the bill that they're proposing... Clearly they do not respect the men and women who are carrying on one of the most difficult law enforcement jobs. Listen, people are not going to jail because they are a nun. They're going to jail because they robbed a nun. So we need to be honest about who's inside jails. And I commend my men and women who are correction officers and doing this most difficult job.

Judson: Okay. Do you want me to read the second question on the card again?

Mayor Adams: Yeah.

Judson: When do you expect to report on education standards in private schools from the Department of Education to be completed? When was the last time you toured a yeshiva?

Mayor Adams: Yeah. I went to yeshiva while I was campaigning. And this is something that I have witnessed in schools. African American community, AAPI community, the Latino speaking community. They all say the same thing. And I went to the yeshivas, this is what I noticed. If you listen to them closely, they're all saying the same thing. Culturally sensitive education. We need to re-look and re-examine that. But we also must make sure that our children are in safe environments. We must make sure our children are getting the basic education they need so they can be productive citizens. That's what the report is doing. And so I'm not going to just look at a news story. I'm an investigator, I'm a trained investigator. I'm going to go in and have an investigation and come out with facts. Because when you come out with facts, you can make the right decision, not the facts based on how they appear in the writing somewhere.

Judson: Okay. House Rep. Jim Clyburn said we needed more police vetting and training to avoid police abuse. What is NYC doing on this?

Mayor Adams: Well, we have a police commissioner, first African American woman police commissioner in the history of the largest police department in the city, in the country. And we are examining everything from our CCRB, the Civilian Complaint Review Board, to the disciplinary process. I sat down with my union leaders and told them that we want to streamline the process. You could have a person, a police officer, who's abusive and it would take two to three years before you make the final determination on outcome. I say no to that. We need to move to a system from anywhere to 60 to 90 days to determine if this officer is suitable to be a police officer, if he should be retrained, or if he should no longer wear the blue uniform. Policing is a noble profession and that nobility should never be tarnished by the numerical minority that is not suitable to be a police officer. We have held on to them far too long and you'll see a different standard in our Police Department when you don't hold on to bad officers too long.

Judson: Okay. Last question.

Mayor Adams: Yes.

Judson: Some say that being mayor of New York is the second toughest job in America. Nine months into the job, what do you think and what surprised you about it?

Mayor Adams: Well, listen, this is what I say. When I hear that saying, I say over and over again, "When does the hard part start?" This is not a hard job if you're committed. And I know what hard is. Hard is growing up dyslexic and not realizing until you got to college. Hard is being arrested by police officers and beat by them and then going into the Police Department. Hard is going to school every day with a garbage bag full of clothing because your mom thought you were going to be thrown out. I know what hard is. All this takes is dedication and commitment. I love my city. I love my country. And we're going to make sure our city is equitable and fair.

Judson: Okay. Well thank you so much for that.

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