

# Transcript: Mayor Eric Adams Appears on CNN+ With Dana Bash

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**Dana Bash:** Hey everybody. Welcome to the Interview Club. I'm CNN Chief Political Correspondent Dana Bash, and today's show is the first in a series that we're calling "Mayors That Matter." I'll chat with mayors from across the country and ask them questions that matter to you most. Joining me today is New York City Mayor Eric Adams. With a population of nearly nine million people, New York City is the largest in the country. So let's listen to the moment Mayor Adams won his election.

**Mayor Eric Adams:** We are so divided right now, and we're missing the beauty of our diversity. We have to end all of this division of who we are, where we go to worship, what do we wear — no! Today we take off the intramural jersey and we put on one jersey, Team New York.

**Bash:** Now, Eric Adams is a native New Yorker, not all mayors of New York City have been, he's just the second Black mayor to be elected in the city's history. He was an officer in the New York Police Department for over 20 years and retired from police service as captain. He is also a former New York State Senator and served two terms as Brooklyn Borough President. As mayor, Adams campaigned on a lot of promises, to create more affordable housing, provide housing for the homeless, make the city safer by targeting gun violence and crime, and lead the city out of the pandemic. Adams reinstated a plainclothes anti-gun unit, criticized by some as an outdated policing practice. He also started clearing out homeless encampments across the city in the hopes of placing those experiencing homelessness into shelters. Now some call that move cruel and said it showed a lack of understanding towards those who are living on the streets. So we have a lot to talk about with Mayor Adams.

**Bash:** And remember, you can engage in this conversation, you can drive the conversation, what do you want to know the most? Well, click the red ask a question bottom at the bottom right of your screen to submit questions and upvote the ones that you see and want answered and we're going to do our best to get through as many as

we can. Mayor Adams, are you there? Thank you so much for joining me. I appreciate it, sir.

**Mayor Adams:** I went to put a pillow behind me so I can sit up well.

**Bash:** We want you comfortable. We want you comfortable. So let's get right to the questions that are coming in. The first one comes from Dotty who asks, "Mayor Adams, I am afraid to ride the subways. There has been so much crime. Please can you flood the subways with cops? I would like to see cops walking through the subway cars every so often."

**Mayor Adams:** I agree. First, Dana, let me say this, you are on the mark. Mayors determine the outcome of states, that will determine the outcome of our entire country, and by speaking with the mayors, you are really identifying a problem. People who are closest to the problems, they are going to be closer to the solutions. And the question that is asked about the subway system, it states a lot. And I am in the subway, 2 am, 3 am in the morning to look at the initiative that we have put in place and I share the concern of Dotty. We need to number one, ensure that we have a visibility, what is called omnipresence of our police officers. Our police officers are back on the train, doing the right things they are supposed to do, over 650 nightly engagements we are participating in and we are really looking at proper enforcement, but not heavy handed, because we have to create the real, not only the perception of safety, but actual safety, and far too many crimes have taken place in our city. We have conducted over 80,000 station inspections to combine those who are assigned to the Transit Bureau and the Patrol Bureau, those are the guys that are on the streets doing patrol. That's the combination we needed to make sure we can get this done right and regain confidence in our transportation system.

**Bash:** Next question is about homelessness. Sarah Rogers asks, "How does NYC handle the homeless issue and the mountains of trash that seem to be generated at these locations? Are there designated areas such as camps where health issues can be addressed?"

**Mayor Adams:** The worst title you could have in a city is dirty, unsafe, and poor to your economy or your business community, and unaffordable for your city. You don't want that reputation. And cleanliness is next to godliness, and I'm a big believer in that. And it is a combination of our Department of Sanitation to make sure we're going to put in

place a real clean corp so that we can go and clean our streets again, because trash appears to be everywhere, we're dealing with a rodent problem. But at the same time, we have to deal with the encampments. And I made a commitment that we were going to zero in on encampments so that people who are homeless can live with dignity. There's nothing dignified about living on the streets. Some of the encampments that we witnessed had human waste, had needles inside, had trash inside. We owe New Yorkers more than that just to walk away from these conditions.

**Mayor Adams:** So we have opened several hundred beds with wraparound service for those who are dealing with mental health issues. We want to reach a capacity of 500 and once we fill those, we're going to evaluate so we could pivot to the larger amount that we need. We have identified over 244 locations that we have visited where you had encampments. We removed 239—five New Yorkers, a low number, asked for assistance to go inside to shelters, but we learned from our transit initiative, first week, we only had 22 people that seek assistance, but as it went on, we had over 300 people who sought assistance, and we're going to continue to do that.

**Bash:** You talked about moving the encampments. First you heard, I know you are hearing and I mentioned at the beginning of this, a lot of criticism about doing that because of the nature of the atmospherics around these encampments. But also given the fact that you are New York City, and even in times when housing in other cities is affordable, it's almost never affordable in New York City, and now it is that plus-plus, it's really hard to find affordable housing. How are you trying to address the homeless situation by addressing the affordable housing crisis?

**Mayor Adams:** Affordability is the key. And there's several things we must do. Number one, we need to build wherever is possible, and that means, in my belief, that we need to ensure that we upzone areas that we have traditionally not upzoned, those that are near transit hubs. That is the best way to go about ensuring that you can build affordable housing in real locations. Number two, we have to keep our public housing, we call it here NYCHA, we have to keep it affordable and invest in it. There's an important piece of legislation that is in our state capitol now that's dealing with something called a land trust, so that we can put the money into creating a first class public housing system. And we must bring it into real time so we can analyze the buildings using dashboards and the right metrics to get the level of quality housing that we deserve. Number three, something that's often ignored, we need to identify those landlords who are breaking laws to displace longtime tenants. Yesterday I received a call at two in the morning where a tenant was displaced in an illegal eviction. We had to

give her temporary housing, but we also go into that location and we're going to take legal action on that landlord. Too many people are being displaced when you look at it.

**Mayor Adams:** Then we need to get back into the business of affordable housing. It was called the Mitchell-Lama program years ago, where you do low-income condominiums, co-ops, homeownership is the key so that people are not displaced. They look at basement apartments, accessory apartments, accessory units. Let's think differently, retrofitting our hotels. There's so much more we can do to think differently, we just have to be bold enough to do it, and we are going to be bold enough to do it.

**Bash:** This question from Neil, "How do you expect people to live on minimum wage in this city? Do you have plans for rental assistance, wage increases, better job opportunities?"

**Mayor Adams:** Well, Neil, I was part of the Fight for 15, to make sure that we increase the minimum wage in this city. I was on the ground with the union members, District 32BJ, 1199, DC37, I was very much engaged in that battle as the borough president of Brooklyn. We need to make sure that the city is affordable on so many levels. Here's what I am doing as your mayor. Number one, we advocated for the earned income tax credit increase, and we believe we're going to get it from Albany. We put money into the Reduced-Fare MetroCard. We are looking to compensate or ensure that we supplement for those who have childcare, that we can pick up some of the costs of childcare so people can get back to work.

**Mayor Adams:** And then ensure that we help our young people. Over 100,000 young people, we have Summer Youth Employment, we lean in with our partners in corporate America to do paid internship programs so they could get some money in their pockets and then look at how we train people to place them on a pathway to have gainful employment as they move up through the economic ladder in our city. Herculean task, but we're excited about the possibilities in the plans we've laid out.

**Bash:** So this question from Johnxyz is related to the two others, "I have a six figure income, I can't find reasonable housing in NYC, building income cut offs and/or extraordinary broker fees. I now have a remote job. Why should I stay in New York City?"

**Mayor Adams:** You should stay in New York City because this is the greatest city on the globe. We're known for our diversity, we're known for our excitement, we have so much to offer. This is the place to live. And I agree with you 100 percent, having the salary that you're looking at, oftentimes we forget about middle income New Yorker. It's a combination that I think we need to look at, low, moderate, and middle income New Yorkers, because that's the financial ecosystem we need in our city to make sure that all are benefiting from the prosperity that we have to offer. We know the increase, what happened during the pandemic, many people lost their jobs, many people found housing to be difficult to find. It is our responsibility to find that combination for those who are making \$100,000 and those who are making \$12,000. That challenge of finding affordable housing is what we're going to continue to address in the years to come.

**Bash:** What are you seeing right now, just to follow up on that, after I just even know for my own family and their experience, those who live in New York City during the pandemic, there was a big flight for people who could go elsewhere, not just for corporations or people who used to work in New York City and that are working from home elsewhere, but actually live in New York City. Are people coming back? Does it feel like it's getting back to normal? Or is there a new normal?

**Mayor Adams:** We are having a flight in several areas that many people don't realize. Number one, we have a real flight from our public school system. And, you know what's interesting, at the high list of who's leaving our public school system, you would have thought it was affluent New Yorkers, but no, it's actually moderate Black and brown New Yorkers who are leaving because the city has become too unaffordable. But the number one issue I'm hearing from my high income earners in New York, remember 51 percent of our income tax is paid by two percent of high income New Yorkers. So with that financial ecosystem, we need everyone here.

**Mayor Adams:** I hear number one, the public safety and affordability. Those are the two major issues we're facing. And I say over and over again, and it has almost become a slogan attached to me, the prerequisite to prosperity is public safety and justice. We get the city safe, our transportation city safe, our system safe, our streets safe, people will stay in New York and return to New York. Because listen, who wants to live somewhere else other than New York City? This is an exciting place, and we know that we can bring back that excitement once we keep and have a safe environment.

**Bash:** One subset of what you're talking about of public safety and violence against people who live there is against Asian Americans. Christine B. asks, "Violence against Asian Americans has been rising. What are you actively doing to protect Asian American New Yorkers from being attacked in subways and on the streets?"

**Mayor Adams:** Something that is very dear to me and not only professional but personal. Over 20 years ago when a young, Asian delivery man was attacked, I stood with the family and the community to call for reward for his apprehension, and I've been known as a constant partner around those who are the victims of hate crime, particularly those from the AAPI community. Number one, we want to use technology. We are placing video cameras and surveillance in those communities with AAPI and other communities reside in close community environments, so we can identify those repeated offenders. Two, we're asking our district attorneys to have a no plea bargaining understanding, you commit a hate crime, we should not plea down those crimes and allow people to believe that they can commit these crimes without any real level of justice that's going to be handed out.

**Mayor Adams:** Number three, we have to be honest with ourselves, our city is divided. We live in silos. We want to build into our educational system so our children can come together and learn from each other. Children are not born with hate. When you have a 13, 14, 15-year-old draw swastikas or attack members of the AAPI community, we have to ask ourselves, what are we doing as a society? It's an indictment on who we are. We want to reinstitute our Breaking Bread, Building Bond initiative, 100 dinners across the city, 10 people at each dinner, all coming from different ethnic and religious backgrounds, and doing something I like to say revolutionary, talking to each other, learning from each other, and bringing a healthy environment.

**Mayor Adams:** And finally, our bias unit, we changed leadership there because I don't want to cover up hate crimes when we see them, we need to call it for what it is, and this way we can keep in front of our minds if the problem is increasing to make sure that we can have the decrease we're looking for. And I think it's a combined effort on how do we deal with the hate crimes in our city.

**Bash:** You went outside of, at the time, wasn't that long ago, but last year, of the trend inside your party by opposing the defund the police movement, saying that you want to fund the police, and that is precisely what President Biden said in his State of the Union.

How is that actually working out in real terms when it comes to the reality on the ground and in the streets of your city?

**Mayor Adams:** Well, I do analysis with all of my agencies. I did, in New York, something called a PEG, P-E-G, Program to Eliminate the Gap. Across the board I told all of the agencies that they must have a three percent cut to make sure that we're using taxpayers' dollars correctly. And we did an analysis, we don't want to impact needed services around health care and around public safety, as I said, that's the prerequisite to prosperity. I did not join the bumper sticker, the slogan, or just to be reactionary to say, defund the police. We did a close examination on how they're using their dollars. We have a civilianization plan in place saying that I don't want police officers to do clerical jobs, they need to be on the streets doing the role that we hired them for. We are reexamining how we're using overtime and how we're deploying police. So I want to make sure the New York City public is getting the best bang for their dollars. And if it means that we have to use funds or do more different or different ways of policing, we would do so. But right now I do not share those calls to defund, I call properly funding police and having them doing a function that they're supposed to do.

**Bash:** Just to follow up from James M., what was your reaction to the moment when President Biden said, "fund the police"? And also are local and federal politicians bridging the policy gap on crime? I'm guessing you're going to say –

**Mayor Adams:** I think President Biden is right on point. He has been amazing. Let me tell you, when we reached out to him right up to the primary and asked him to come to New York City to see on the frontline of what our crisis management teams are doing, these are the civilian population that are going after crime, he did so. When we told him can he come and listen to us about funding the ATF properly, coordinating the efforts between the federal state and city lawmakers, the same way we did after 911, he did so. He has been on the front line of this issue, and he has been bold enough to talk about it.

**Mayor Adams:** But we have to end gun violence, there's no getting around that. Yesterday we had a 61-year old-person that was shot in the Bronx, innocent bystander. A few days ago, we had a 12-year-old baby that was taken from us because of the gun violence. And this is one thing if this was playing out on the streets of New York City, but let's be honest, it is playing out across the country. And so when I instituted the anti-gun unit, we saw a substantial number of gun arrests within the first few weeks. They

made 132 overall arrests, 20 some of them was for guns. And here's the real number that's troubling, out of the number, the arrested people with gun, 68 percent have prior crimes. That is the problem and that's the connection we must make with our criminal justice apparatus and our state and federal lawmakers, and I believe we can close that gap. Do you know thus far, we have removed over 1,100 firearms off our streets? And there's just an endless flow from ghost guns to other types of guns. We have to stop this madness in fixations on guns in our country.

**Bash:** Christine B., this is a really – I mean, all these questions are really important, but this is one that I know has vexed mayors and local officials, state officials, the president for months, and that is masks. "Where you are in New York City", Christine B. says, "masks are optional for New York City students over five, and next month, younger kids may also go maskless. Currently, COVID cases are rising in New York City schools. So, what are you going to do to help contain or reduce infections in schools?"

**Mayor Adams:** This is one of those topics that no matter what answer you give, there's going to be a substantial number of New Yorkers who are for, substantial number New Yorkers who are against, so if you use the philosophy that I used from the beginning of taking office, I'm going to sit down with my healthcare professionals, I'm going to hear what they present, and I'm going to follow the science that they give me and how they interpret that science. Now, you may have individuals in other states and other municipalities that want to do things differently, like we saw in Florida, and that's fine. That is their state, their city, that is not New York City, which is unique unlike any of the cities because of our dense population.

**Mayor Adams:** So we are going to slowly peel back the mandates. We peeled back some of the mask requirements, except those for two to four-years-old. We're going to continue to do what's needed to ensure that we analyze COVID. Every morning, I look at this, we're making the right moves, we have a morning briefing, and listen, we have been getting it right. When people had to close schools across the country, we did not have to do that because of the million take home tests and the million tests that we did. We saw that schools were the safest place for children, and we made the smart decision, and we're going to continue to do that so we don't have to go backwards with COVID. I know what the impact of COVID did to our city, and I'm not going to allow it to happen again.



**Bash:** So Mr. Mayor, are you saying that you are open to the possibility of saying that there need to be masks once again in schools, depending on the way the numbers are going?

**Mayor Adams:** I'm going to daily listen to my healthcare team, and we have a team, not one doctor, not one commission, an accumulation so we can get input. And whatever the health issue calls for, we are going to talk about. Right now, we're moving in the right direction, we're telling New Yorkers to be smart. There's no reason now to go back to mandating mask, right now. But if we reach that point that the pandemic is at a crisis level and we have to pivot and shift, like COVID, which I say is a formidable opponent, we will pivot and shift. We are not going to be afraid to make the tough decision. We're going to make the right decision. The goal here is to be prepared, not to panic. And that is what we have done, and that is what we're going to continue to do.

**Bash:** Mr. Mayor, you said no matter what you say about masks, you're going to get somebody coming at you from another side, and we have evidence of that right here. It's so amazing how this issue has taken on a life of its own. This is from Taylor S., "Why are two to four-year-olds the only age group in New York City required to mask? Adults are able to go to bars and concerts, two to four sit in daycare with a mask on. What's the timeline to remove masks for them? What data is New York City looking at that no other major city is?" I'm guessing I know the answer, but let's hear it.

**Mayor Adams:** Well, first of all, I thank her for that question. I know this is an emotional issue. I want to remove masks off our babies as much as the next person. We wanted to announce today, on Monday, that we were going to take them off two to four-years-old, but when I made that announcement that we were going to take them off, I was clear, if numbers start to shift in the wrong direction, we're going to reevaluate and come up with the proper time to do so. That is what's happening now. We have a new variant, and when my doctor sat down and shared with me the data, some of these unique cases that impact babies, we should have a low tolerance of illnesses that impact babies.

**Mayor Adams:** And listen, let's be honest, Dana, we don't know what COVID is going to do to us in the long run and we need to really be honest about that. So we have to make the smart decisions. And so the only reason we're doing something differently from what they're doing in other municipalities is because New York is different. We have 8.8 million people in this city, closely dense population, and so we have to treat

New York like a unique place and not follow what they're doing in Arkansas or in Kansas. That is not New York City, and I'm making decisions straight from those medical professionals that I have put together as a team, and they advise me every morning.

**Bash:** See, I thought you were going to say something different. I thought you were going to say because they can't get vaccinated yet.

**Mayor Adams:** Well, that's one of the issues, but that's not the primary issue. That is one of the issues, we don't have a vaccine for them. I'm not wedded to waiting until a vaccine come for them. I'm waiting to make sure the numbers are stabilized and we're not going to expose them. We've done a great job, positivity rates have stabilized, hospitalization is normal, people are taking the vaccine, the booster shots. We're doing the right things and we need to stay on this cautionary task or road that we're on so we don't go backwards.

**Bash:** Another question of this ilk from Jessica, "There are zero pediatric COVID cases in our hospitals right now. Why are we the only city in the world to be masking toddlers?" Well, I think you answered that, but if you have another explanation or another point that you want to make, please do.

**Mayor Adams:** Because we are the only state, the only city on the globe like New York City. There is no other city like New York City. If we gauge our reactions, behaviors based on other cities, we will make a big mistake. People duplicate New York City because of the density, the population, the diversity. We have a unique way of dealing with crises, responding to crises and recovering from crises. This is not Eric's thought on how to address this, this is based on my medical team.

**Mayor Adams:** You know what else is interesting, Dana? For every person that is saying, take the mask off two to four-years-old, I'm having several parents that are matching those numbers saying, "please don't do that right now because my child goes to a daycare center or is in that setting." So there's a duality to this concern. And looking at the data again, I want to take masks off. I feel we can do so, but we do it when a medical team says we're ready to do so. There is not a single voice on this, and it's so important for us to understand that.

**Bash:** Last question, this is a good one from Natalie, "what are the three things that you are looking most forward to as we continue through 2022? And what three things are you most dreading?"

**Mayor Adams:** Number one, boosting our tourism again. We're hoping to have 56 million tourists in the city. It looks like we are projected to have close to eight to nine million coming from outside. I want us to bring tourists, it's a multi-billion dollar industry that helps many low wage employees to be part of the prosperity of the city. So I'm looking forward to the tourism.

**Mayor Adams:** Number two, I'm looking forward to the level of normality where we are able to get people back into their office spaces, because being in an office space feeds the economic ecosystem of our city. I need the accountant back in the office space so he can go to the local restaurant, he could bring in business travelers, he could patronize the small businesses that we are seeing.

**Mayor Adams:** And number three, I'm looking for the nice weather so we could go to the many concerts, many outdoor experiences, go to more street fairs, one of my favorite things to do. But we can all do this if we have a safe city. So I believe we got to have public safety, a strong economy and get our city up and operating again. You don't do it if your streets are not safe, and we're going to make our streets safe.

**Bash:** Anything you want to talk about that you're dreading. It doesn't sound like you're that guy, you definitely want to stay upbeat.

**Mayor Adams:** Yes. I want to be upbeat, but I want to be realistic to New Yorkers. We are facing unprecedented challenges around our economy, unemployment, we are leading the nation in unemployment after COVID. We're dealing with a real crime issue because of the over-proliferation of handguns, mental health crisis, homeless crisis. I want to be honest with New Yorkers, this is an FDR moment after the Great Depression. That honesty gives us an opportunity to lay out what we have done thus far in our first 100 days, and what we are going to do for the future. But it starts with me telling New Yorkers, here are the honest challenges we are facing, and here's what I have done since I've been your mayor, and here's what I'm planning on doing in the future.

**Mayor Adams:** My mom used to do that during the difficult times, she would show us exactly how much money we had to run the household and what the plan was, so when we had to go without Christmas toys, without a Thanksgiving meal, least we understood mom was doing the best she can and we moved together with the challenges we had in front of us, and I want to move together with New Yorkers with the challenges we have in front of us. I love New York. I think New York is one of the greatest places on the globe. We're going to make some hard choices, but we are going to defeat COVID and we're not going to have a lockdown again, the goal is to rebuild the economy and rebuild the spirits of New Yorkers.

**Bash:** Mayor Eric Adams, thank you so much for doing this, the first in the series of Mayors That Matter, and I appreciate you saying how important this is, because you're exactly right, talking to mayors across the country, you guys are on the front lines of making policy and paying attention to the things that matter to citizens closest to home. So I really appreciate it. And a special shout out to our members for joining us today with your incredible questions.

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