

Transcript: Mayor Eric Adams Appears on News 12's "Under the Gun" With Tara Rosenblum

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Tara Rosenblum: Regardless of who's to blame, there is little doubt that with every new headline pressure continues to mount for you and your administration to make these streets safer. And within the same breath, you're also being asked to confront police reform at a time of racial reckoning. How do you do both at the same time and get it done right and done quickly, because no one wants to head into a violent summer?

Mayor Eric Adams: That is such a perfect question, and that's the uniqueness of my role as the Mayor of the City of New York. As a longtime advocate on police reform, knowing the things we can do to make New Yorkers safe without being abusive, that's what was needed at this time. But I'm clear, no matter what happens on the state level or the federal level, it is my obligation to ensure New Yorkers are safe. I'm going to make sure my cops get it right but at the same time I'm not surrendering our city to the violence that we're seeing. We had 29 people shot the last few days. That is unacceptable.

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Rosenblum: What trauma do you still carry with you from that experience?

Mayor Adams: It was a serious trauma. It took a long time before I was able to get it out of me. And, sometimes, in order to get trauma out of you have to go in and face it. When I got into the Police Department and became an advocate for police reform, the pain that I was reliving every time I heard police sirens, reliving that beating. When I was in and became active in the Police Department and fighting for reform, I felt a renewing of my spirit and that terrible place is behind me that happened at 15 years, as a 15 year old child.

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Rosenblum: A few days after giving your inaugural speech, you were giving a eulogy speech for an officer. What kind of impact does this have on you in your private moments? We see you at the press conferences, but how is it hitting you personally?

Mayor Adams: It's very painful. I can still hear the family members, just feeling with the pain. These were boys. These were babies. When you see a young man, as both of these officers were, when you see them taken from us in a very horrific way, they were assassinated. And just watching the families that night, I was inside the hospital rooms and watching their fellow officers. You think about that. And every day that I'm on this journey, I realize that I have to do everything in my power not to allow that to happen again. And I understand the pain. I carry around a picture of Robert Venable, my close friend, that was shot several years ago during my early days of police, and I always have Robert's picture. The pain never dissipates. Every birthday, every holiday, every time you think about it, every time that you hear a siren, see a police car, they think about their loved ones. And all I can do is commit myself to prevent, either eradicate or alleviate the level of violence that we're witnessing in our city.

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Rosenblum: I have it right here in my hands, and I think what people want to know above all else is, when is this document going to lead to results? When do you anticipate that the gun violence rates will start to fall in New York City?

Mayor Adams: Well, we want it to fall immediately, but as we stated over and over again, some of the rivers that we must dam that are mentioned in my blueprint, I'm not in control of. I'm not in control of the laws in Albany. I'm not in control of the funding for ATF and the coordination without our federal government. Those things that are within my control, such as putting money in our foster care system, they are going to be carried out immediately and you're going to see results from that. But we can get a faster result if we get those items that we pointed out on our state and federal level. But regardless of their participation, we're going to move forward with our plan.

Rosenblum: How are you ensuring that your officers avoid those abuses and those mistakes of the past?

Mayor Adams: The first thing we must do is ensure the narrative is right. There has never been an anti-gun unit like the one I turned out. There was an anti-crime unit. There was a street crime unit. There were different versions of plain clothes officers carrying out a job. We heard the criticism from New Yorkers. Police officers jumping out to cars without identifying themselves, not having body cameras, not having the right training. We heard all of those criticisms and we put in place an anti-gun unit, a modification of uniforms so they could be easily identified, special training. Many officers wanted to be in the unit. We told them you don't fit the profile that we want. Having a Sergeant there, using body cam cameras, continuous training.

Rosenblum: But how do you rectify all the controversy on a personal level with your own background as a young man who was beaten unconscious by a white police officer in custody? How does that work? How do those two things factor for you?

Mayor Adams: You turn pain into purpose. Mother used to say, "If you find yourself in a dark place, you make the determination if it's a burial or a planting." This is the fruits of the harvest of that dark place I was in and determined it was a planting. Now, I can take the experience of police abuse and the experience of protecting New Yorkers and produce the product that we deserve of, number one, having support for our police, but sending the right message. If you abuse the nobility of public safety, you cannot serve in our Police Department. The finest must be the finest.

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Rosenblum: So much of the success of this plan hinges on your relationship with the governor and the president. You recently had a private audience with President Biden on this very issue. Are you getting what you need from the federal government to do this right?

Mayor Adams: You get more. I think it's imperative to pass the Build Back Better bill. That's what he's fighting for. I think it's imperative to properly fund the ATF. They helped us find the person who was shooting homeless people in Washington, D.C., and New York, so it shows how important it is.

Rosenblum: What do you do if you don't get the help?

Mayor Adams: Doing exactly what we're doing now. I didn't wait for the help from Washington, D.C. to put in place our anti-gun unit. Our anti-gun unit was on the street for six days, and they removed 10 guns. That's more than a little over a gun a day, and they made over 30 arrests. It shows that there are things we can do here, that we do precision policing. People find it hard to believe, there's just a small number of people who are committing a large number of crimes. We need to zero in on them.

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Rosenblum: Does [Governor Kathy Hochul's] proposed reform go far enough?

Mayor Adams: I think she's doing it right. She's making sure the end of the day is not what you say, it's what you produce.

Rosenblum: Do you like what you've heard so far about the plan?

Mayor Adams: Yes, I do. When you look at the plan, it clearly shows that we're in the same direction of dealing with not only evidence and discovery, which is crucial, but is dealing with the issues around young people carrying guns. People like to just lean into the bail aspect of it, but there's so many other pieces to make sure that we can get crime right.

Rosenblum: You were patrolling these very streets back in the '80s, during the height of the crack pandemic that saw a spike in gun violence. What do you think? Are we less safe, or are we safer now?

Mayor Adams: Well, we could always be safer, and let's be clear on this, that safety is not only action, it's how we feel as well. You don't have to be the victim of a robbery, to be on the subway system where a robbery took place and feel as though you're not safe. So, we have to deal with the actual crimes in our city. We're witnessing an uptick in just about all of the seven major categories. We have to deal with that actual crime, but we also have to deal with the feeling that people are safe. That means removing the encampments in our city, getting the homeless situation on our subway system under control, making sure that we don't have every drugstore is locking up their supplies because they can't prevent people from shoplifting. We've reached a point to where our

city is out of control, and I state, we deserve better as New Yorkers. We did it in the '80s and '90s, we can do it again.

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Rosenblum: Suicides are up, retirements are up. There is a feeling amongst a lot of officers that the previous administration didn't have their back. Can they count on you?

Mayor Adams: My message is a clear one. I'm going to give you the resources, I'm going to give you the support, I'm going to give you the things you need to do your job, but that covenant comes with you not abusing your authority, and I'm clear with my officers, and the officers of this city. You will get our support, but with that support, you will not abuse that shield, and what does that look like?

Mayor Adams: We've been sending a mixed message, and the wrong message to police officers. We say it's unlawful to trespass and jump the turnstile, yet, when they make an arrest, we don't prosecute. We tell them it's wrong to go into a store and steal things off the shelves, and have our drugstores closed down, so low-wage employees can't keep a job, yet, when they make an arrest, we let the person go and say, "We're criminalizing poverty." We can't send the wrong message, and I'm not. My message is clear. You don't break laws in our city. That is the message that we're going to be clear on, and if I'm asking my officers to be on the front line and do their job, then I'm going to support them when they do their job.

Rosenblum: And your other top priority is the post-pandemic economic recovery. Can you have a full economic recovery without tackling gun violence first?

Mayor Adams: No, you can't, in my belief. You can have it simultaneously. We have to do that. The prerequisite to prosperity, as I say, is public safety and justice. Public safety and justice, that's the foundation of getting people back into their office spaces. And so, I am asking New Yorkers to trust me. We're going to get the safety under control. In the meantime, I need people back in their office spaces. We have to get the city up and operating.

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Rosenblum: You are aware by tackling gun violence in America's largest city, your policies are going to be closely scrutinized from coast to coast, and any significant successes will catapult you on a national stage. I know your chief of staff has mentioned you in the light of JFK and even made comparisons to Barack Obama. Mr. Mayor, do you have any national aspirations?

Mayor Adams: Why would I? You can run the country from New York. The way goes New York, goes America. The way goes America, goes to globe. This is New York City. What we do here, we determine what happens in America. I want to be the Mayor of the City of New York. That's what I asked for. That's what I have. And my mother used to tell me when I was a child, "Boy, that's what you ask for."

Rosenblum: What grade would you give yourself so far on tackling what was the cornerstone of your campaign, gun violence?

Mayor Adams: We have so much more to do to make our cities safer and to do that is a holistic approach is not only the guns that are on the street, but it is really stopping and damming the river that causes people to pick up guns. So I look at what we're going to do around dyslexia screening, what we're going to do around foster care, how we're going to improve our school system, and we're going to see the results of how we are approaching this in a holistic way.

Rosenblum: So what grade does Mayor Adams give Mayor Adams?

Mayor Adams: I'm not a grader. I'm the student.

Rosenblum: And he's right. Ultimately it will be up to the voters of New York City to grade him on his most crucial test to date, ending all the violence. This is Under the Gun.

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