

Transcript: Mayor Eric Adams Appears on "Stay Tuned with Preet" with Preet Bharara

April 26, 2022

Preet Bharara: Eric Adams has been a public servant for four decades. He was an officer in the New York City Police Department for more than 20 years, retiring with the rank as captain. He went on to become a New York State Senator and the Brooklyn borough president. In January, he became the 110th mayor of New York City.

[Applause]

Bharara: It's great to be here. I want to get something on the record right off the bat. I'm a former U.S. attorney and I think it should just be clear that this is a non-custodial interview.

[Laughter]

Bharara: And I will not be Mirandaizing you. So, you had a big day?

Mayor Eric Adams: Every day in New York is a big day.

Bharara: Right. But you gave a big speech today on the state of the city. And I half thought you were going to say, "The state of the city is full of swagger." Did you think about saying that?

Mayor Adams: Yes, I did. And we are full of swagger. New York is a unique place. And it's all about- people often talk about our buildings, our structure, our brick and mortar, but that is not our secret. Our secret, I borrow from the phrase from Snapple soft drink, we are who we are because we are made up of the best stuff on Earth where New York is.

[Applause]

Bharara: Snapple had nothing to do with that endorsement. I just want to make that clear. So, President Sparks stepped on a line of mine, because I was going to talk about some of the things you said in the speech. And it's a way to talk about your vision for the city, what happened in the first 100 days, how you envisioned the next number of thousands of days? And you talked about New York in a particular way. And as she pointed out, you said there are two types of people in this world, New Yorkers and those who wish they lived here. But then you began the speech by saying, "I feel sorry for the people who live in small towns and not New York City." That's great for this crowd here. I have many listeners who live in small towns. Can you explain to them why those statements are accurate statements of law?

Mayor Adams: Well, I've crisscrossed not only the country but the globe. And what many people don't understand that when you are in a small location, it's like being in a garden with one flower. The beauty of the crosspollination of ideas, of culture, of music and sound. You can walk into a Chinese restaurant, have a Russian cook from a menu that he learns from his Mexican girlfriend, that grew up in the South Bronx. You know the diversity-

Bharara: Is that a hypothetical or?

Mayor Adams: That's a reality. And so, our diversity, when you move through the city and if you allow yourself not to be isolated in one different area, there's something that you come away from. And many of the monolithic small towns, they don't have that same benefit that we have here. Every block is a small town in New York City.

Bharara: Larger than a small town.

Mayor Adams: That's right.

Bharara: You have nothing against small towns.

Mayor Adams: No, I love them.

Bharara: And John Cougar Mellencamp is fine by you?

Mayor Adams: That's right.

Bharara: All right. So, we have been through a lot.

Mayor Adams: Yes.

Bharara: As you pointed out in your speech and on the campaign trail, and as everyone here knows, COVID, inflation, unemployment, which is getting better. And you said something interesting that I want to ask you about. You have said on the 100th day, we're a little bit past that now, but you said on the 100th day, this is an FDR moment. And I think you mentioned FDR in your speech today as well. What are the kinds of things, that's a big thing to say, what are the kinds of FDR level programs like social security and things of that nature, that you think we need, that you think you can get accomplished for the City of New York? And then compound question, is it an FDR moment just for you in New York City or is it also an FDR moment for the president, for governors around the country, and for mayors of other cities?

Mayor Adams: I love that question. I love that question. When I was in South Africa, I heard Archbishop Desmond Tutu say a quote that I live by. We spend a lifetime pulling people out of the river. No one goes upstream and prevent them from falling in, in the first place. Our country is built on a system of a downstream mindset. All we do is wait downstream. It's almost dysfunctional. We wait to have people fall in the river of foster care. We wait for children who are dyslexic like I am, to fall in the river. 30% of our prison population, they are dyslexic. We wait for people to fall in the river, mental health illness, 48% of prisons at Rikers Island, mental health illnesses. Healthcare. We wait for people to have chronic diseases instead of having preventive medicine in a real way. And so, this is a real moment for all of us.

Mayor Adams: I just believe that we are at a different place in our existence as human beings, because men have gone through evolution, men and women have gone through evolution. We've gone from the Neanderthal to another level, to another level, to another level. They didn't know at the time they were going through that level that they're about to transform. We don't realize we are about to universally transform how we exist as human beings. And so, this FDR moment means that we better get ready for what we expect in life and it's not what we expected previously.

Bharara: I think that's great, but is there a particular program?

[Applause]

Mayor Adams: Childcare. We were able to successfully get the resources we need for childcare that has held back women and poorer communities for years. They were paying \$55 a week for childcare, because of our success it's down to \$10 a week. We are going to do dyslexia screening in all of our schools. That's unimaginable when you think about it, when 30% of the prison population are dyslexic. We're going to go into a healthcare system, as you know I had Type 2 diabetes, I lost my sight. Doctor said I would be blind in a year. I was going to lose some fingers and toes. They stated that, you know, I was basically going to be on insulin the rest of my life. We invested in lifestyle medicine, plant-based diet, Dr. McMacken. We started reversing chronic diseases like my chronic disease was reversed. We're now going to expand that citywide. So, what you are seeing my administration is doing, we're taking New York City upstream, and this is an FDR moment because we're going to change how life is in New York.

Bharara: So, with all the difficulties with the economy and I imagine, you touted the budget in your success in balancing the budget this year in the speech, how do you do these big FDR moment types of things in the current economy?

Mayor Adams: By running our cities more efficiently. Remember, this is one of the first times that we witnessed the budget decreasing. You know, the projected budget was over a \$100 billion. We went down to \$99.7 billion, and we are calling on the agencies to produce a better product. We've gotten so used to having product that is not really representative of what we're paying taxpayers. How do you spend \$38 billion educating children and every year, 65% of black and brown children never reach proficiency? That's just unimaginable. And so instead of just thinking, you spend more, how about doing more? And we could do more, and we could do better.

Bharara: I want to talk about public safety. There's a cornerstone of your campaign. You and I both have significant law enforcement backgrounds. Could you remind me who the police commissioner is?

Mayor Adams: You know, I have an amazing police commissioner, the first African American Latina to be police commissioner in the history of New York City. It is Police Commissioner Sewell and she's just amazing.

Bharara: The reason I ask is I thought the police commissioner was you.

Mayor Adams: Ok.

Bharara: But what I mean by that is, how much attention do you pay to the police department? How much are you managing the police department? How independent is the police commissioner from the mayor?

Mayor Adams: Oh, listen, if you know Commissioner Sewell, you should have her on one day. She's not going to let you go-

Bharara: I don't know. Will she come?

Mayor Adams: Yes, she would.

Bharara: Ok.

Mayor Adams: She's not going to let you run her. She is one tough, tough cookie. But here's the important thing, I'm the leader of the city and generals should lead from the front, they shouldn't lead from the rear. I'm not going to send my commissioners, my deputy mayors into battle and say, "How was the war?" I'm going to lead them into the war and fight the battle. Traditionally, the mayors had to turn over police departments and the thinking around public safety to the police commissioners and take a step back.

Bharara: But Rudy Giuliani was not a cop. He was a U.S. attorney, but that's a totally different thing.

Mayor Adams: Yes, it is.

Bharara: We'll talk about that.

Mayor Adams: And in the Southern District where you came out.

Bharara: But he was, he was.

Mayor Adams: And so, it is imperative the partnership we have developed is really bounce ideas off each other. And she is a person that does not come with an ego. She's about how do I make the city safe? That is her only focus. And she's doing an amazing job in accomplishing that and we going to turn around this crime.

Bharara: So, a lot of bad things have happened with respect to crime in the city since you've been mayor. In your third week, two young police officers were shot to death. One of the saddest things you can see. Just a couple of weeks ago, there was a subway shooter who brought to mind awful terrorist attacks. The crime statistics are not good. The crime has gone up. There's a flurry of hate crimes happening in the Jewish community, in the Asian community and in the trans community, not just here but around the country. I guess my first question about that is, what matters is not just whether crime is increasing, but the perception of whether crime is increasing. What do you think the perception is of New Yorkers about that? And does it match reality?

Mayor Adams: Yes. When you see the increasing crime, those are real numbers. We have to fight two things. We have to fight the perception because perception is reality. And then we have to fight the actual numbers of those who are victims of a crime.

Bharara: And do you think those are aligned or are there people who are underestimating crime or overestimating crime in the city at the moment?

Mayor Adams: No. I think it's a combination. You get up in the morning, you read the paper and you hear about someone was in the head with a hammer while they entered the subway station. Then you enter the station, and you see encampments, you see disorderly conduct, you see yelling and screaming, you see dirt and trash. Now what you read turns into your reality, even if you're not a victim of a crime, you are saying, "I see a state of disorder." So that's why we have to deal with the actual crime, and we have to deal with those who are seeing conditions that lead to you feeling unsafe. That's why we went into removing the encampments on our subway system.

Bharara: So, I think that's a great point. For you as a mayor and for your police commissioner, is the way to attack the problem of actual crime and perception of crime to go after actual crime? Or are there things that you can do that are different to make people feel more comfortable in their perception? Do you know what I mean?

Mayor Adams: Combination. I use the term intervention prevention. Prevention, those are the long-term things we're going to do. But intervention, those are the things we need to do right now. What does that look like? We should not have people sleeping on our subway system. That's an indictment on us. There's nothing dignified by living in those conditions. So, we must remove the encampments off our subway system.

Bharara: But are those people engaging in crime or is that a different problem of homelessness and people who are unhoused?

Mayor Adams: Well, that's one of the questions we should ask the Go Family. It was a homeless person with mental health illnesses that pushed her to the subway tracks. And the countless number of crimes that's being attached to people with mental health illnesses that no one has given them proactively services they deserve. And so I'm not going to wait until a Ms. Go is pushed to the tracks, I'm going to give people proactive support that they deserve. And when we started this initiative of dealing with those who are dealing with mental health issues, only 22 people in the first week responded to our call. Now we have 700 people because we built trust.

Bharara: What do you say to folks who criticize you and say, "Really what Mayor Adams has done is to get those people who are without homes out of sight, rather than get them help."

Mayor Adams: I think it's to the contrary, I think they should do what Norman Siegel is doing. Norman Siegel is putting together a volunteer group of 100 different New Yorkers that are willing to go in the street and speak with people. Before I started this initiative, I spent weeks going inside encampments, talking to people who were living in encampments. I saw a human waste in the corner.

Bharara: When you went-

Mayor Adams: I saw people using drug paraphernalia.

Bharara: What'd they say to you? What'd they say that they wanted? What did they say their lives were like?

Mayor Adams: They said they're afraid to go into shelters. They'd rather live on the street.

Bharara: And are they right to be afraid to go into shelters?

Mayor Adams: No, they're not right. So, what did I do? I told my team let's create-

Bharara: Some people didn't agree with that.

Mayor Adams: Listen, New York, 8.8 million people, 30 million opinion for one mayor, that's going to make the decision.

[Applause]

Mayor Adams: So, what did I do? I told my team, after hearing from those people, I said, "Let's make brochures and show them what they're moving into." And we went out with brochures, and they looked at them and they saw the conditions, that's why we went from 22 to 700.

Bharara: Those brochures, because I've seen brochures of hotels that I've then gone to, and there's a little bit of a disconnect.

Mayor Adams: Oh, without a doubt. But people were holding on to the conditions of what they thought the shelters were. And no one is going to tell me that living on the street in a tent, with no bathrooms, no showers, no meals, no access to healthcare, no access to mental healthcare, no one is going to convince me that, that is more dignified than going inside someplace we have three meals, access to healthcare, access to shower, access to a caseworker. I am not going to accept that as a city, we can pass by people that's living on the streets. I'm not going to do that. And that's not going to happen in my administration.

[Applause]

Bharara: Going back to your speech and some of the issues, because you spent some time on public safety, as I think was appropriate, you said something very simple that I

think is non-controversial and you said it twice. And it's interesting to me that in this day and age you had to say it. And you said, "I will support my police." And I think you said it twice. Can you describe why it is necessary to say that and why that's a little bit, in 2022, a bold statement to make? And why are there people in your view and on your analysis who need to be told that the police should be supported?

Mayor Adams: Well, first of all, I said two things and they went together.

Bharara: I know. You did.

Mayor Adams: I said, "I support my police, but they can't be abusive." Because remember I was arrested at 15, beat by police officers. And instead of saying woe was me? I said, "Why not me?" Reverend Herbert Daughtry and civil rights leaders told me to go into the police department, I became a cop. And I saw the importance of public safety and justice. And so, when I tell new Yorkers, "Support your police." I tell police officers, "You won't be abusive in my police department and serve in our police department." So that's the balance that we are talking about, but we need to support our police. Listen, I'm not going to send police officers on the front line and tell them to go after guns. We took 2,500 illegal guns off the streets since I've been the mayor. Think about that.

Bharara: Is that a lot of guns compared to how many guns there are on the streets?

Mayor Adams: Let me tell you something-

Bharara: How many guns, do you know? I don't know the answer.

Mayor Adams: Too many. And here's the real fear. Here's the real fear. Not only did we take off 2,500, when I spoke with Mayor Lightfoot who took off 18,000 off the streets of Chicago.

Bharara: The Chicago mayor.

Mayor Adams: Yes. The Mayor of Chicago. Here's the real fear, Supreme Court is about to rule on open carry.

Bharara: Yeah. It's not going to be good.

Mayor Adams: I don't know if Americans realize, or New Yorkers realize what that means for us. Second, ghost guns. You have some nut that can sit inside his own house and make a gun, no serial number. So if we don't get away from the fixation of guns in our society, we're going to have a major impact on public safety.

Bharara: Listen, can I ask you a question about guns? And I'm 100% with you. And when I was a U.S. attorney, we focused on gun crimes and recidivism among people who used guns for violent crimes and possessed guns if they had been felons. But how uphill a battle is it in City of New York, no matter how much you crack down when all these other states have much more lax laws? I mean, how futile is the exercise?

Mayor Adams: Well, one thing is extremely disappointing for me is that President Biden was really the first president to start having a real conversation about what we're going to do about guns. Other presidents passed over it. So, 9/11 happens, what do we do as a country? We stated never again will we allow the lack of information sharing to have someone come on our soil and take thousands of lives. We have not done that with gun violence. Every day we are having countless number of innocent people losing their lives in our cities, across America, this is not only New York.

Bharara: Right. But there are parts of America where you can go to a gun show and there are all these loopholes, not just ghost guns, but other things, and it's really easy to bring them into the city over the bridge or through the tunnel. Are you thinking about engaging in national action and advocacy to protect New York, not just doing things in New York?

Mayor Adams: We have to. And let's be honest, when you look at the legislation that has been passed on a national level in Washington, has been passed because of assault rifles, because of school shootings, which is important for us who have done that. But you don't see that same urgency. The problem in America is the handgun, but who's the victim of handguns? Black, brown and poor. There's never been an urgent move towards addressing the handgun crisis. We need to have a real ATF leader as the president has nominated. We need to double up on ATF. We only have 24 ATF agents in the country, 80 in New York. We need to do information sharing to identify those gun dealers that are placing guns in the city through illegal means. And we need to really deal with gun trafficking. We were successful in the state and have them drop down the

numbers for gun trafficking. So there must be a national movement and my mayors across the country, they hear what I'm saying and we're going to rally together to address it.

Bharara: Is broken windows policing good in your view and is it back?

Mayor Adams: It's bad when it's abused, and I don't believe in the concept of broken window policing. You know, when we talked about-

Bharara: But you do believe in the concept of, and I guess it depends on what label you give it, in quality of life improvement.

Mayor Adams: Yes. And here's what it looks like. Ms. Jones is waiting on the store, getting ready to take her hard-earned money and buy some shampoo. Some other character comes in with a bag and decide he's going to steal everything off the shelf and walk out without paying. No, it cost money. Because if Duane Reade says to me, "I'm closing down my stores here, because every day someone is coming in, stealing whatever they want and walk out." So, you know what happens, that low wage clerk is no longer employed. That person that's stocking the shelves is no longer employed. So, I'm not criminalizing anyone by saying, "You cannot do whatever you want in this city and disrespect other people." I'm saying it's a standard of expected behavior in our city, and we don't have to be heavy handed as policing to get there. We've eroded the basic duties of being a citizen. We should have never legalized on public urination. What were we thinking about? I mean, come on.

[Applause]

Bharara: I don't know. It's optionality. As they say, on the Harvard business-

Mayor Adams: Listen, look-

Bharara: What do you think about certain prosecutors in the city who some time ago, a former prosecutor in the city, who said we were not going to prosecute people for turnstile jumping.

Mayor Adams: Listen, I believe I think it was wrong.

Bharara: That decision was wrong?

Mayor Adams: Yes, it was. Because number one, we input into our budget, an increase in reduced fare MetroCard, permanent, it's baseline. Also, if a person comes to the train and they can't pay their fare, do you know there's a process you can go to so they can get on for free. There's a process.

Bharara: Is that in the brochure?

Mayor Adams: Get the information out.

Bharara: I have no idea.

Mayor Adams: Get the information out. But the thing is that a city as diverse as New York must run on systems and respect for the rules of being in the city. You can't have a city where someone is deciding I'm just not going to pay. I'm just going to walk on the bus. I'm just going to carry a gun. I'm just going to take whatever I want out at the stores.

Bharara: So, do you get on the phone with DAs and say you need to rethink this?

Mayor Adams: Well, listen, we sit down every week, and we have some amazing DAs from Bragg, to Eric Gonzalez, to Melinda Katz, to our Bronx DA, we-

Bharara: You didn't mention the Staten Island DA.

Mayor Adams: And Staten Island also as well.

Bharara: You mentioned four of the five.

Mayor Adams: Staten Island's not the forgotten borough with me. I spent a lot of time out there.

Bharara: Just a forgotten DA.

Mayor Adams: But we sit down, and we talk often and there are areas where we agree and areas where we disagree and that's okay. I don't know why we believe we must agree with each other all the time. Like I said, I don't agree myself all the time. You know, so it's about how do we sit down and talk? How do we come to a middle ground? And there's some policies that they have implemented that I just don't agree on. And I'm sure there's things that I do that they don't agree on.

Bharara: We'll be right back with more of my conversation with Eric Adams after this. Are you sleeping? It's a valid question. And it's also a great new podcast from the sleep experts at Mattress Firm produced with Vox Creative. In these days people are exhausted. We need more rest. There is so much happening right now. Is it any wonder we're up at all hours of the night? Sleep and I have a fickle relationship. I have always been a night owl. And like so many of you, I often struggle to get enough of it.

Bharara: I always wondered how some people can function on three hours of sleep a night, while others need eight or nine to think straight. Are You Sleeping? is a podcast that pulls back the covers on all of it. Join host Kate Berlant as she explores incredible real life sleep stories with leading experts, in the latest episode, Dan's kids insist on sharing his bed every night, since the pandemic. He wants some help easing them back into sleeping on their own plus learn about the history of co-sleeping. Check out Are You Sleeping? and subscribe wherever you get your podcasts. Are You Sleeping? Listen now.

Bharara: So, you said something that I think was really significant in the speech today on public safety. And it was just a line, a couple of lines, but I think says a lot. And I don't know what it quite means. And I think it's important in this debate about what the police should be responsible for. Whether we rely on the police for all sorts of things, they're not quite in their wheelhouse. And you said something like, I took my own notes, I have a transcript, not every 911 call needs a police response.

Mayor Adams: Right, right.

Bharara: That's a big deal thing to say. What does that mean in real life?

Mayor Adams: So, what we are doing now is that we are doing an analysis of all of our 911 calls. And we're saying, "What do we call police for?" We have been indoctrinated with the belief that anything that happens immediately pick up the phone

and call the police. There are some calls for mental health illnesses that you don't need the police. There are calls for past crimes. You don't need the police. And so instead of using police to do the job of dealing with real violent incidents, we should be using other entities like we're investing in to use services and service providers that's not police related. We have to wean ourselves off of 911.

Bharara: So, what are some examples of things that shouldn't be the police's job?

Mayor Adams: Someone calls and say, "My mother's feeling depressed." You don't need a police to do that. Get a mental health professional over there. Sometimes the mere presence of a police uniform can aggravate the situation.

Bharara: Escalates it.

Mayor Adams: Exactly. It makes it even worse. And so it's about using what is being done in other municipalities, of really weaning the public off of believing police is the only response.

Bharara: And when you say a thing like that, are the police with you?

Mayor Adams: I believe they are.

Bharara: Right. They don't want to do those things?

Mayor Adams: No, they do not.

Bharara: And what about members of the public who are critical of the police? Are they also with you on that?

Mayor Adams: Yes, they are. I think-

Bharara: So, who is against this?

Mayor Adams: 8.8 million people.

Bharara: It is just because it's easy to have I guess we have 311 in New York also, but is it just easier to have the police do everything?

Mayor Adams: Yeah. And it's something else that I realize in the city. Trump did something to us.

Bharara: I'm sorry, who?

Mayor Adams: I said Trump. Donald Trump.

Bharara: I was hoping he wasn't going to come up in this conversation.

[Laughter]

Mayor Adams: But he did. And I said it when he was in office, I said, "I'm no longer concerned about him. We are going to vote him out. I'm concerned about what we've become." People can't even go to Thanksgiving dinners anymore. We've become so combative. We're no longer deep listeners. We don't seek to understand so we can be understood. We wait for you to finish the sentence so we can tell you how wrong we are. People find creative ways just to disagree with you. People beat me up. I'm a plant-based eater that was able to reverse my healthcare crisis, and my blindness, and my nerve damage. They say, "Yeah but we think we saw you eat a piece of fish." So what? So what?

[Applause]

Bharara: Well, you know what, I wasn't going to bring up vegan gate. But in fact, it's not that they saw you eat a piece of fish, it's that you had your press person say flatly that the mayor doesn't eat meat or fish and he's a vegan. And you look great by the way. Whatever diet you have, whether it's 99% vegan or 90% vegan, I'm in.

[Laughter]

Bharara: But in fairness, I think the issue is a little bit different from how you describe it.

Mayor Adams: I don't think it was. I think that we are in the, I got you. We're in the, I got you. We need to keep the main thing, the main thing. And my press person is not running around with me all the time. And so he's going to say what he wants to say. But listen, the bottom line is, why have we become a place of I got you, instead of a place, I got you. I got you.

[Applause]

Mayor Adams: That's the place we need to be. Instead of focusing on, "Hey, this guy reversed his blindness." Diabetes is the number one cause of blindness in America. Number one cause of non-trauma limb amputation in America. So why not say, "Let's look what this guy is doing." Because I walk down a block, people are not saying, "Hey, did you have a red snapper?" No.

[Laughter]

Mayor Adams: They're saying, "Tell me the diet you on because I'm getting ready to lose my sight." That's what it's about. Let's keep the main thing, the main thing.

[Applause]

Mayor Adams: And let me tell you this, let me tell you this, this is the most-

Bharara: You have more to say?

Mayor Adams: This is the most important thing to know about me, I'm perfectly imperfect.

[Applause]

Mayor Adams: Perfectly imperfect.

Bharara: And so are the people who are clapping. COVID. It is important to you and I think to a lot of folks, that people come back to New York.

Mayor Adams: Yes.

Bharara: For the vibrancy of the city but even more importantly perhaps, for the tax base. People have gotten used to not doing the commute.

Mayor Adams: Right.

Bharara: They're not coming back, not just every day, but no days for some folks. How are you to get people to think differently about that and go back to the way it was? That's a huge challenge. And so, I don't envy you in that challenge. How are you going to do that?

Mayor Adams: No, and great question. And here's different levels. And one level is the most interesting level. My son's generation. They're the most socially conscious generation I ever met. My son would not have a cup of coffee unless he knows the beans were picked by those who were paid a fair wage and what country it came from. I mean, it's unbelievable how his generation is just people must be treated fairly. And so, I sat down, and I said, "Jordan, think about it. You can stay home. But if you stay home, then that person who works in the cleaners that normally cleans your suit is not getting paid. That person who's a dishwasher in a restaurant at a low wage, or a cook, or a waiter, they're not getting paid. So, by you staying home, yes, you can stay home, but the financial ecosystem says you must be back out there so that business travelers, which is 70% of our hotel occupancy, with HTC employees, the maid, the matrons, they all get paid."

Bharara: So, when you say that, I find that very compelling. What's the response?

Mayor Adams: He said, "Dad, never thought about it that way."

Bharara: And did he change his mind?

Mayor Adams: Yes.

Bharara: Or you're working on it? It's an ongoing problem.

Mayor Adams: No, he's back out. He's back out. And that's the message we have to get out to people. That our financial ecosystem depends on all of us being engaged. And not only that but look at the numbers. We're seeing the social determinants of health is talking about loneliness. England has a loneliness czar. You know living-

Bharara: It does?

Mayor Adams: Yes, yes. Loneliness is going to become a major crisis. We have an increase in suicide. Increase in young people thinking about attempted suicide. We can't live alone.

Bharara: Do we have enough money in the budget to address mental health in the way we need to?

Mayor Adams: You never have enough to deal with the mental health crisis, but we are leaning into the mental health crisis. We have an amazing team. I have Dr. Vasan, for those who are familiar. He was with Fountain House, that's why I recruited him. I was so happy to get him on my team, where he looked at wraparound services for those who are dealing with mental health crises. But we have to destigmatize mental health illnesses. Because when you go to someone and say, "I have a mental health illness," now you stigmatize them. We want to move into a space of wellness. And wellness is not only physical wellness, but it's mental wellness as well. And when you start saying, "We want to create wellness environments," people view it differently than it's trying to stigmatize and classify people to a certain form of illness. Wellness is wellness. We need to be well.

[Applause]

Bharara: I want to ask you about Rikers Island. When I was a U.S. attorney, we commenced, we didn't commence, we joined a lawsuit that already existed against the city and the Department of Corrections because of undue violence and excessive use of force. And there was a court order, and a consent decree, and a monitor imposed, and it's only gotten worse. And the violence, there is even worse. And my successor, Damian Williams, last week sent a letter to the city saying we are considering asking for a receivership and taking authority away from the city with respect to Rikers Island. And you responded, basically I'm paraphrasing here. "I just got here. Give me a chance." What is it that you think you can do to reverse the worsening problem at Rikers?

Mayor Adams: Well, first of all, you should be commended because it was not on the radar of others. And by you compelling us to examine Rikers, it really put us in a place that a real blemish on our city for a long time. Rikers did not start getting bad January 1st, 2022, it has been a system of denial. The attitude was, hey, they on Rikers Island, the predominantly number of those who are employed there, both civilian and correction officers are black and brown. Large number of women that are black and brown. And we basically said, "Ignore it." And so, you threw a spotlight on that. The previous administration failed. January come, 1/2022 what do I do?

Bharara: The administration before that failed too.

Mayor Adams: And before that, and before that, and before that. So, Eric Adams-

Bharara: So, what do you got?

[Laughter]

Mayor Adams: Right. Eric Adams comes on, January 1st, 2022. I come in with Commissioner Molina. Commissioner Molina came from a facility that had a special monitor. He got him out of the special monitor because of his changes. So, all I'm saying to everyone, "Give me a chance, you know, give me a chance."

Bharara: But are you able, I know it's only been 100 and something days to articulate a theory whereby you'll be successful in the prior three administrations were not?

Mayor Adams: Yes. Yes.

Bharara: Are you going to, like now?

[Laughter]

Mayor Adams: You know, I never forget someone coming up to me and say, "All of these darn potholes, you can't fix them. What's wrong with you?" And I said, "Sir, it's January 2nd. Come on." Listen, how do we have generational problem-

Bharara: You gave a big speech about... This is I got you.

Mayor Adams: Yes.

Bharara: And I'm not going to press you further, but you gave a big speech, it's been 100 days and we've done all these things and it's an FDR moment. So, you're a little bit putting yourself in the position of being asked hard questions about concrete policies, because you're touting the things you've done in the first 100 days.

Mayor Adams: Yes.

Bharara: So, I think it's a reasonable question in the face of increasing really a born violence at Rikers Island. It just gotten worse. Not your fault, you didn't start it. You've only been here a little while. I would just ask you to think quickly about why the U.S. attorney is wrong on that point. You said something else.

Mayor Adams: Well, wait, wait, you can't leave that out there.

[Laughter]

Bharara: Okay. I was letting you off the hook, actually.

Mayor Adams: I don't want to be off the hook. Winners want the ball when the game is on the line, I want the ball in my hands.

Bharara: Ok, the ball is yours.

[Applause]

Mayor Adams: The U.S. attorney, he did analysis based on historical problems in Rikers and I respect that. I have no problem with what he said. We must convince the people of the city and the U.S. attorney, and the special monitor, that we are moving in the right direction. And that's what we're going to do. They're going to lay out exactly what their recommendations are, we're going to implement them and we're going to

show the reason why. Now, look at what happened. We had thousands of correction officers who were not coming to work. We got a 1,000-

Bharara: For the people who don't know there was a huge absenteeism problem-

Mayor Adams: Right.

Bharara: That got worse, and worse, and worse.

Mayor Adams: And we had 1,000 return. We just did-the violence on violence in Rikers, we just did a mass inspections of cells. Do you know we covered over 1,000 shanks, think about that?

Bharara: That's a lot of shanks.

Mayor Adams: Right. We moved from solitary confinement. We're now moving into a punitive segregation that is not as abusive and intrusive. You go to see our educational program where young people are getting real skills, so they won't be part of the revolving door. So, we are doing things on the ground in Rikers Island. And that is how we're going to get out of this mess. But we also going to stop the feeder. No one wants to talk about the feeder that places people on Rikers Island and that's what I'm talking about. Let's stop the feeder that put peoples on Rikers Island.

Bharara: I know your team wants to get you going, but I got a couple of final things. I'm sorry because could we...you said it's going to be hard for people to hate me, because we are listening in your speech today. Do you worry about being hated? And then the famous question that arises is would you rather be loved or feared?

Mayor Adams: I would rather be respected. I would rather be respected.

[Applause]

Mayor Adams: And a lot of my naysayers, they did something that's revolutionary. They started to read. They started to say, "Let me stop yelling at him. Let me read his blueprint to end gun violence." You know what they saw? They saw one paragraph on

giving discretion to judges. And they started to read these other paragraphs invested in foster care children, crisis management, dyslexia screening, homelessness, summer employment. They said, "Wait a minute, this guy is saying what we are saying." We're not listening to each other anymore. All we are doing is yelling at each other. Let's just read. Let's just talk. Let's just figure out how do we live together?

Bharara: I think respect is a good way of thinking about it. This is not a got you question, but if I don't ask the question-

Mayor Adams: It's still good.

Bharara: I'll be questioned. So, you can be very quick about it. And then one more thing and we'll let you go. When your tax returns are available, I mean-

[Laughter]

Bharara: How can I not ask the question? I know you got an extension, you had COVID. I'm glad you've recovered. You look great. When your tax returns are filed, will you disclose them to the public like most mayors have done?

Mayor Adams: Yes.

Bharara: Is that a yes?

Mayor Adams: Yes, yes, yes.

Bharara: Okay. Great.

Mayor Adams: But here's-

Bharara: If you don't want to make a comment, you don't have to. I want the yes.

Mayor Adams: No, I want to make a comment. I don't like stuff out there. Here's what I was saying to the arrogance of the reporter that asked the question and how he asked it. Someone needs to watch how he asked the question. And the city-

Bharara: Did I ask it arrogantly?

Mayor Adams: No, you didn't.

Bharara: Ok.

Mayor Adams: You were polite.

Bharara: All right.

Mayor Adams: The city gave clear rules. This is what we expect of our elected officials to show that they are transparent. They gave us the rules. My COIB report, my files, they told us what we have to do. I comply every year, every year. So when you arrogantly come to me, because you're not going to disrespect me, and ask your question, like I got to answer you yes or no, do you know what you're going to get? You're going to get a no. I don't have a problem with-

Bharara: You want me to teach that reporter how to ask the question properly?

Mayor Adams: Yes, you should. I pay a lot of taxes and New Yorkers are going to see how much I pay.

Bharara: So, do I. Good. So, I'm glad. We don't have to blame the [inaudible]. Last thing I'm going to ask you, because your people are getting really annoyed, I think. So the last three mayors-

Mayor Adams: Yes.

Bharara: ...of the City of New York, whatever you think of them, they all had one thing in common. Rudy Giuliani, Michael Bloomberg, Bill de Blasio, they all ran for president.

[Laughter]

Bharara: And I think they were like the worst presidential candidates ever.

[Applause]

Bharara: Like, they sucked so bad-

[Applause]

Bharara: And Democrat, Republican, Bloomberg, whatever party he was from-

[Laughter]

Bharara: I think they got a total in three elections, like nine votes.

[Laughter]

Bharara: So, my final question to you, sir, on this important rainy day, is it in the City Charter that you must run for president? And are you competitive enough that you want to get 11 votes?

[Laughter]

Bharara: What does the future hold for you with respect to national politics and the presidency? And I know you will dodge it, but I had to ask that.

Mayor Adams: No dodging. You can run America from New York.

[Applause]

Bharara: You were prepared for that. You were prepared for that. Is that all you want to say? You want to-

Mayor Adams: Yes. There's-

Bharara: That's it?

Mayor Adams: New York, listen, this place, I don't think New Yorkers really appreciate, what we mean to the entire globe. The way goes New York, goes America. The way goes America, goes the globe. And what we do here impacts our entire country. You can run America from New York.

Bharara: Thank you.

[Applause]

Bharara: To close I just want to say the thing that I said to you when I met you some months ago, when you were running at 11:30 at night, walking down the street on Park Avenue, we didn't even get to talk about the nightlife stuff, maybe next time. And I said, we may agree a lot. We may disagree from time to time. I'm just a citizen who cares about the City of New York. I want you to succeed.

Mayor Adams: Yes.

Bharara: I do agree with you that the city is the greatest, not just in America, but on earth. It's a really important place. It's a really special place. I feel so much gratitude that I get to be a part of the city and got to have a job in the public service in the city. I really wish you luck.

Mayor Adams: Thank you.

Bharara: Thank you for your service.

Mayor Adams: Thank you.

Bharara: I hope you have a great rest of your term.

[Applause]

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