

Transcript: Mayor Eric Adams Discusses President Biden's Nominee to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms And Explosives (ATF) and the Ghost Gun Rule

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Mayor Eric Adams: First, I want to give an update on my status. I was diagnosed with COVID-19 infection yesterday. Returning from Albany, I woke up Sunday morning and I had a raspy voice. And with my normal tradition every day, I attempt to take a COVID test each morning. For the most part, I try to do it every morning. And when the test came back negative, I made the determination, because of the raspiness of my voice, to reach out to Health + Hospital. They arranged for me to take a PCR test. I was able to have the PCR test come back within a few hours later and determined that I had COVID, tested positive for COVID. In just an overabundance of caution, when I had the raspy voice, I make the determination to cancel my morning events, did not want to take any chances.

Mayor Adams: And I wanted to take the test right away because I had several events during the day. And I want to immediately know, in the latter events, if I should cancel them or not. And so I want to thank the doctors at Health + Hospital for their quick response. And I also want to thank the pharmacy. We have an unbelievable service where all New Yorkers are able, who qualify, able to get necessary medication that assists them during this period of time, the antivirals. I was eligible because of my preexisting conditions, prediabetic as well as a history of having high blood pressure and other medical issues that allowed me to be eligible for them. So I want to thank the doctors, pharmacies and everyone that's involved.

Mayor Adams: In addition to that, I feel fine. Outside of the raspy voice, I feel fine, no fevers. I'm not tired, no aches or pains at all. What does that say? Booster, vaccination.

That could be the difference between hospitalization and possibly even worse. I want to encourage every New Yorker to get boosted and get vaccinated. The mere fact that I'm able to, I believe, fight this virus with just a raspy voice is because I took the necessary steps of getting boosted and vaccinated. And so when people state that I'm vaccinated and I got COVID anyway, that is not the point here. The point here is preventing serious illnesses about being boosted and vaccinated.

Mayor Adams: And so I want to now turn my attention to the president and his announcement today. I cannot thank the president enough for taking the crisis of gun violence seriously in our city and in our country. In many of the conversations that I have had with him, he has clearly shown his commitment and dedication to deal with this important crisis that we are facing. The important step that he took today to start the process of severing the buying pipeline that delivers daily weapons to New York City, where guns have become an everyday occurrence in too many cities in America.

Mayor Adams: His announcement today has shown how we need help. We need help on many levels. Just this year alone, the New York City Police Department has taken 1,800 guns off the streets just this year. Yet the guns just keep flowing into our city and flow into cities all across America. The New York City Police Department has a ghost gun task force unit that focused on this. And they're partnering with the ATF and the FBI. But we have to do so much more. Just last week in Brooklyn, the 83rd precinct, NYPD recovered eight AR-15s, something traditionally we have not had a problem with in our city. The handgun has been the crisis in the cities, but an AR-15 was recovered, five completed handguns and parts to make more guns, all ghost guns. Think about that for a moment, ghost guns.

Mayor Adams: Yet we still have these illegal guns on our streets. In order to beat and best approach this effort, we need to dam the river of guns and ghost guns that are flowing into the sea of violence in our city. And the ATF needs a permanent director. And Congress should expeditiously move forward and appoint a permanent director to deal with this critical process that we are facing. I would hope a position of this importance will secure bipartisan partnership because when a bullet leaves the barrel of a gun, it doesn't ask the victim if they're democrat or republican. They maim, they take a life and they destroy families in the process. Both democrats and republicans must come together and ensure that we get this appointment moved forward. An agency needs a strong and permanent leader to maximize its ability to get stuff done for Americans. And nothing personifying getting stuff done more than dealing with this senseless violence that has crippled our cities across America.

Mayor Adams: Once the ATF has a permanent director, they need to double down on their efforts to combat gun traffickers, take down gangs and stop straw purchases before these weapons reach the city of New York and cities across America.

Mayor Adams: Now let me turn my attention to ghost guns. And the Biden's administration deserves credit for taking strong steps to tackle the problem of ghost guns, the type of ghost guns that was responsible for the tragic death of a 16-year-old child in the Bronx. Yes, that was a ghost gun. Ghost guns are one of the biggest threats to public safety that we face today. Ghost guns are untraceable. They are just as deadly as any other gun, any other firearm. People often believe that because they are a ghost gun, they're not deadly. That is just not true. They should be treated as such. And we must prosecute those who are in possession of them just as we prosecute those who are illegally in possession of firearms across this country. No one should be able to build a gun in their home in 30 minutes, unacceptable, and make it dangerous for people to move about their cities.

Mayor Adams: And make no mistake, this is a crisis. We are at a crisis level. The number of ghost guns appearing in New York City, they have skyrocketed this year alone with 163 recovered since January of last week. That's more than five times as many as last year when we received and recovered just 29. Ghost guns have made up approximately 10 percent of all guns so far that have been recovered in New York by the New York City Police Department. This is a real issue that we are facing and has taken this crisis, not only from the pipeline that finds its way into our cities, but now we have created the pipeline within our city.

Mayor Adams: I believe it's imperative, with the combination of the New York City Police Department and the announcement that President Biden made today, partnering with ATF, the FBI and local law enforcement authorities, we can not only clamp down on the illegal ghost guns, but we can also focus on the guns that are manufactured in legal ways or distributed illegally. We must face this issue head on. This is one of the most important rivers that feeds the sea of violence in our city and in our country. It's time that we dam today. This announcement gives us an opportunity to dam one of those rivers. I open the floor to any questions you may have.

Question: Good afternoon, Mr. Mayor. How will you decide when to resume in-person events? 10 days after testing positive? Or will you wait until you get a negative PCR?

Mayor Adams: I'm sorry. Ask the question again. You came in-

Question: How would you decide when to resume in-person events? 10 days after testing positive? Or will you wait until you get a negative PCR?

Mayor Adams: I'm going to follow the directions from the doctors. The doctor gave me clear directions. He stated five days after the positive, I'm able to go outdoors wearing a mask and I should keep a mask on at all times while I'm out. And I'm going to follow his directions.

Question: Hey. Good afternoon, Mr. Mayor. I wanted to ask about the mandates around masks. I know Philadelphia today reinstated their mask mandate for indoor use. I'm wondering if you are considering making any changes to either the mandate or the restaurant indoor sort of requirement, especially after you've been diagnosed with COVID.

Mayor Adams: Well, we're going to continue to listen to our health team in the morning and the recommendations come from them and we're going to continue to follow that. But I'm not special as being the mayor of what happens to me personally should not determine how I make policies. It should be what happens to the city of New York. One thing I know for sure that I feel comfortable that the fact that I am boosted and vaccinated, my response to the virus has been more positive than the countless number of people who are not vaccinated and not boosted. So again, I want to encourage New Yorkers to get vaccinated and boosted so that they can fight this virus off the best way possible.

Question: Mayor, I'm just wondering, obviously, you were at a lot of events over the last week and some large gatherings unmasked. Are you planning to change any of those behaviors once you're cleared to return to public events?

Mayor Adams: When you say change of going to many events, is that what you're asking?

Question: Going to events, going unmasked, being in crowds. What are your thoughts on all of that?

Mayor Adams: As I stated, the doctors instructed me five days of the fifth after to wear a mask out in public event. I'm going to listen strictly to the doctor's orders on what to do because I trust our Health + Hospital. But the number of events I'm going to continue to try to be as visible as possible as we get through COVID and many of the other crises that we are facing. And I think it's important to continue to encourage New Yorkers to be vaccinated and boosted. I think that with the history of preexisting conditions that I will probably have had different outcomes if I was not vaccinated and boosted. Again, I feel fine, no fever, no runny nose, no aches and pains outside of the raspiness in my voice. That is what sent me to say, let me do a double check. But again, I take it COVID just about every day. I try to take it every day before I start my day and enter to see the public.

Question: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. You described these ghost guns as one of the major rivers feeding crime here in the city. You reported that 163 of them have been seized so far this year, but that accounts for fewer than 10 percent of the guns seized so far by the police department. How did you come to the conclusion that this is one of the bigger rivers feeding crime in the city? And when can people expect to see results in the effort to cut crime seeing as it's up by some 40 percent?

Mayor Adams: Yeah. Let me deal with the first question, Nolan. The difference between the ghost gun, which is 10 percent, and 10 percent is a percentage too much. 10 percent of the number of 1,800 guns, that's 180 guns. 180 guns. One of those 180 took the life of a 16-year-old child. So that's a crisis for me. One illegal gun is a crisis, but then when you look at the fact that these ghost guns, they do not have to travel through the iron pipeline or come up I-95. They can be manufactured right inside someone's home. That is a crisis. That is a new element to fighting guns that we have to be prepared for. And deal specifically with your question around results, I want results right away. And we need help from the federal. We received some help from the state and some of the initiatives that they put in place, and I want to commend them for that. But I want results right away to stop the killing of children and innocent people in our city.

Question: Just to follow up on ghost guns, have you or anybody in your administration tried to reach out to a lot of these online retailers to try and see if there's a different way to stop this flow into the city? Anything you can do on that front, any legal way you can come at them? Is there any way to make it illegal so that packages where these weapons are delivered to homes just are illegal now? Is that possible?

Mayor Adams: Well, first of all, I thank you for that question because you are right on target. We must keep up with the methods that are being used to saturate our communities with guns. And we need to look at every way that they are taking place and zero in on the manufacturers and the software and any other methods that are being used to manufacture these guns is crucial. And we're not going to leave any stone unturned.

Question: I just had a quick question about timeline of events. I know you recently attended the ReelAbilities Film Fest. I was just wondering if you got tested at all for COVID prior to that and if you think there might have been a chance that you were exposed before that event. I believe there were some immunocompromised people at that event.

Mayor Adams: Which event was that that you said I attended?

Question: I believe it's called ReelAbilities Film Fest.

Mayor Adams: Well, I'm not aware of exactly that morning before going to the ReelAbilities Film Festival. That morning, I took a COVID test before. I think that was on Friday, if I'm not mistaken. I took a COVID on Saturday and on Sunday.

Question: So to go back to the issue of rising COVID cases in the city, there is an upward trend. At what metric or at what level in terms of daily average cases can New Yorkers expect there will be some sort of shift? We're starting to see, in addition, as Jeff said, in Philadelphia, some other institutions in the city, including some college uptown has requiring masks once again.

Mayor Adams: Well, it's a combination of things we're looking at. We're looking at the infection rates as well as hospitalization, as well as deaths and how fast the case is spreading. The doctors have created what scenario will cause us to move to the next level. We're not there yet. When we do, we will announce it.

Question: So one thing, just a clarification on the fivefold increase, is that compared to the same period last year? And then my other question is going beyond this Justice Department rule, are there other areas that you want the White House or the federal

government to move on specifically on ghost guns are in general as next steps to combat this problem?

Mayor Adams: I'm sorry, Tim. Give me the first question. I didn't get the first question. I heard the second. I didn't hear the first clearly.

Question: On the increase five times as many ghost guns recovered this year versus last year, is that in this first few months of the year? Is that compared to through April 11th of last year? Or what is that comp?

Mayor Adams: According to the data I got from the New York City Police Department, I believe it is. We will confirm that for you, but believe it's a comparison from year-to-date. And what else we need from the White House, because we are dealing with two rivers here. One is the river to close the ghost guns. And that is what the new ATF head will allow us to really coordinate efforts more. But we must close the river of legally made guns that are illegally finding their way here to our city. That is a focus that we need help with. We want help from the White House to assist us with this. And the president has made it clear. This is one of his top priorities on dealing with the proliferation of guns in the cities across America in general, but specifically here in New York City. And at this time we need help from Congress to make sure that we can get the support that we deserve.

Mayor Adams: Thank you. Thank you all.