

Transcript: Mayor Eric Adams, Gun Violence Prevention Task Force Co-Chair A.T. Mitchell Appear Live on MSNBC's "Morning Joe"

June 9, 2022

Mika Brzezinski: Mayor Adams joins us now alongside Andre T. Mitchell, A.T. Mitchell, the newly appointed czar of the mayor's Gun Violence Prevention Task Force. Also joining us for this discussion is the host of MSNBC's PoliticsNation, president of the National Action Network, Reverend Al Sharpton.

Joe Scarborough: Thank you all so much for being with us. Mr. Mayor, let's start with you. Yesterday, of course, a progressive DA we recalled in San Francisco. A year ago, you got elected in another politically progressive bastion, New York City. I'm wondering, should New York's own DA and should other members of the City Council, who are standing in your way of getting tough on crime, should they take a message from that election?

Mayor Eric Adams: I believe we all should. Something I think is taking place in America, and in New York, you have the numerical minority that are on the far right trying to put guns in the hands of everyone. Then you have a small number that's on the far left that believes we should not hold people accountable after committing crimes. They are shooting at each other, and caught in the middle are the everyday New Yorkers and Americans that are tired of this over proliferation of guns, and we should all take heed of what happened in San Francisco. You saw the San Francisco residents saying, "We don't want to live this way."

Willie Geist: Mr. Mitchell, obviously in the wake of shootings like the one we saw in Uvalde or the one we saw in Buffalo, the focus is on the semi-automatic rifle and the AR-15. But as you and the mayor know all too well, most of the gun violence, most of

the gun deaths in this country come through handguns. That was the point the mayor was trying to make yesterday up on Capitol Hill.

Geist: So what are some solutions to that problem? We're focused right now on the AR-15 and maybe raising the age. Some Democrats want to ban them altogether. What about handgun violence? What are solutions that you've found over your career work?

A.T. Mitchell, Co-chair of the Gun Violence Prevention Task Force: Well, what I've found over my career is that we pour more resources into those neighborhoods where those unfortunate guns have made their way. It's unfortunate that young people in communities across the country have more access to guns than they do jobs, opportunities. And so, with resources, that seems to be the best approach to dealing with that issue.

Mayor Adams: And it's a holistic approach. That is why Andre is playing such a major role. He's always been my gun czar, but his official title as a co-chair of the task force is crucial. I've known A.T. for over 30 something years, almost close to 40 years, he has been in this work. And so, the partnership of bringing government with a person who's on the ground to assure the proper alignment as we prevent crime and have intervention to deal with those dangerous individuals on our streets, which, mind you, is a small number of repeated offenders that we need to finally go after.

Rev. Al Sharpton: You know, Mr. Mayor-

Scarborough: You know, Reverend Al-

Rev. Sharpton: ... following that up-

Scarborough: I'm sorry. Go ahead, Rev.

Rev. Sharpton: Following that up, I think it's important to commend you for bringing [A.T.] to this position. You and I came along together for the last 35 years, including where we would go paint red X's on crack houses to show where they're selling crack.

Mayor Adams: That's right.

Rev. Sharpton: There were always an element in the community that was noisy, saying, "Don't help the cops," but we were also holding the cops accountable. A.T. comes out of that community. If anyone knows on the ground how they think, how they work and are hurting our community, it's somebody like A.T. I mean I watched AT grow up.

Rev. Sharpton: I think that government sometimes fears bringing in the A.T. Mitchells, the Erica Fords. They're the ones we need if we're going to stop this. A.T., you spoke Saturday at our National Action Network weekly rally and you say, "Yeah, I've got the tattoos. Yeah, I've been incarcerated. I'm the kind of guy that understands how to talk to these guys." Talk about that to our viewers.

Mitchell: Well, you have to be closest to the problem. Those that are closest to the problem are best to have a better understanding of the solutions. And so, growing up in Brownsville, Brooklyn, like we did, Rev, it was a rough and tough community. And so, unfortunately, when you're growing up in that environment, you have to adapt.

Mitchell: But at the end of the day, it makes you a person like we are today. It makes us into the men and women that grow up in those communities more successful individuals if they put their minds to it. And so, that's what we are actually willing to do and continue to do in this role.

Mayor Adams: And they say to me all the time, Rev, well, when I bring people who have really learned from their lives, the lives they live, they say, "Well, look at their background," and I say, "Look at my background." I mean who are we kidding here?

Mayor Adams: People knew of my background. They knew of the troubles I had as a child. They knew that I was dyslexic. They knew that I was arrested as a young man. And they said, "We want you to be the mayor of the City of New York, because the life you lived is the life people are living now." We should be happy that we have someone that transformed the arc of his life and now is a productive citizen saving the lives of others who went on the wrong path.

Brzezinski: A.T., you were a founder and executive director of Man Up! I understand, especially given what you just said in the past few minutes, that you want to focus a lot on what's going on in the communities where some of the gun violence is happening. But what about other measures? Republicans said these assault weapons are needed

to kill prairie dogs. There are so many of them out there that you can't really solve the problem. Are there real, tangible solutions that you would like to put into play? I mean what do you think of, for example, gun buybacks?

Mitchell: I think this is a time when we need all hands on deck and we need a holistic approach. I think anything that comes about that is going to take guns out of the hands of people who may use them legally is a plus in our eyes. So, yeah, so anything and everything that can help us to reduce the amount of gun violence that we are experiencing, I believe, is a good thing.

Mayor Adams: Keep in mind, I use the term that there are many rivers that feed the sea of violence, and we have to dam each one, as A.T. has stated. But what we can't do is create new rivers to flow in that sea of violence. The Supreme Court deliberation of taking away the permit process of allowing anyone to have access to guns, just as we dam some of these rivers, we're creating a new river.

Mayor Adams: That's what we're saying to the Supreme Court and Albany yesterday. It's time for us to stop the shootings and placing these guns in the hands of our children. That includes social media. That includes abandoning the AK-47. You don't need an AK-47 to shoot a rabbit. Who are we kidding here? It's time for us to be more sensible as American lawmakers to deal with this violence.

Mike Barnicle: Mayor Adams, there seems to be a potential natural constituency or alliance between two groups that have been separated for some time. That would be Democratic politicians and the police. No one is under threat of gunfire on an hourly basis just doing their jobs than cops in every city in the country. And yet the Democrats seem to be hesitant about trying to put that alliance together. What can be done to strengthen that alliance?

Mayor Adams: You are correct, and I believe it has been a historically big mistake that Democrats talk about the prevention for the most part, many of the Democrats, they talk about the long-term things we must do, but the intervention is right now.

Mayor Adams: When you look at the killers and shooters in cities, there are many democratic cities. But when you look at the state, they are red states. When you look at what's happening in Tulsa, Tulsa's murder rate is three times the rate of Los Angeles.

Look at Mississippi. You look at these red states, they are under fire, but it's the cities within these red states that are dealing with the violence.

Mayor Adams: I think it's time for Democrats to understand that part of the apparatus of the public safety injustice includes the men and women who are placing themselves on the front line. That's why I embrace and support proper policing. I believe we can't send people in the field of battle and not give them the tools they need.

Mayor Adams: But we're not going to allow abusive policing. We need to be clear on that. Good policing is not abusive policing, and that's why we're getting it right in New York. 3,000 guns were moved off the street, 30% decrease in homicides, 30% decrease in shootings during the month of April and May. We're moving in the right direction to get that qualitative public safety we're looking for.

Rev. Sharpton: Right on that point, Mayor Adams. 3,000 guns, I want to emphasize, that have already been taken off the streets since you've become mayor, and you've only been mayor six months. I've noticed and I've had meetings with you and private meetings with you and some of those of us concerned about stop and frisk and concerned about police abuse. There has not been an uptick at all that I've seen from some of the activist groups that I work with in my own group, or people complaining about they've been abused.

Rev. Sharpton: You trying to keep striking that balance.

Mayor Adams: Okay. Great question, Rev, because you and I both know how long we fought to stop the abusive police tactics. I testified in federal court, we marched together, we had several trials around this, testifying with hearings. And so the goal is, number one, use technology. Every interaction now, police officers are wearing body cameras. We're monitoring those cameras. And my Neighborhood Safety Team, we're making sure that the best officers with the right temperament are allowed to go out and carry out the initiative that's focusing on guns. And then we're sending a clear message with discipline. We are going to revamp our disciplinary process to expeditiously go after those officers who are abusive so they don't remain in our Police Department. As you indicated, and sometimes it's hard for people to realize, it has only been six months, and we are turning around this ocean liner. But we are in a good place and a good role, and I'm excited about the future of this city. And I think people are going to look at what we're doing here and duplicate it across the entire country.

Brzezinski: New York City Mayor Eric Adams, and the city's newly appointed gun czar, A.T. Mitchell. Thank you both very much for being on the show this morning.

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