



THE CITY OF NEW YORK  
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR  
NEW YORK, NY 10007

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:** November 3, 2022  
**CONTACT:** [pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov](mailto:pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov), (212) 788-2958

**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR ERIC ADAMS INTERVIEWS WITH THE ECONOMIST  
ASKS**

**Anne McElvoy:** Eric Adams, welcome to The Economist Asks.

**Mayor Eric Adams:** Thank you very much. It's great to be here and speak with you.

**McElvoy:** Now, you've been mayor of New York for almost a year now. You said that one of your priorities was to reenergize the spirit of New York. What is that spirit to you and why do you think it needs something of a boost?

**Mayor Adams:** On September 11th, 2001, I watched those buildings collapse as a lieutenant in the Police Department, and we acknowledged the loss of lives. But here's a day that I remember the most, September 12th. We got up. The flags went out, teachers taught, builders build, retailers sold goods, and we saw that we are not going to allow terrorism to destroy our energy and spirit. And COVID, it wasn't terrorism, but it brought terror. And that same renewal of purpose and focus is what this city is looking for and clarity of direction, and that is what I'm going to present as the mayor of the city.

**McElvoy:** And one very important way in which the spirit and values of the city are being put to the test are these. Since April, around 20,000 migrants have arrived in the city. Many have been sent from Republican-led states along the southern border. And the argument then from Republicans is that so-called sanctuary cities like New York often refuse to work with federal immigration authorities and that they should share the burden. What do you make of that argument?

**Mayor Adams:** Well, we have. When you do an analysis of asylum seekers and migrants, you will see long before this current crisis hit our city, New York has been known to really help absorb those who want to come into this great country. What happened in this case, we saw a humanitarian crisis that was created by human hands. And whenever you deal with a crisis, you should have coordination. That is something that did not take place in some of the border and states and municipalities. If we coordinate together as Americans, we can handle these crises in a more humane way. And we're willing to do our share, not only our legal responsibility, but also our moral responsibility. The asylum seekers are fleeing hardships and violence. We need to treat them with the dignity that we're known for and not as political pawns, and that's what happened.

**McElvoy:** You talk about legal and moral responsibility there rightly, but you've also been on the end of a lot of criticism about plans to house migrants in a tent city or on cruise ships. The criticism there is that the long term plan for what to do with migrants is lacking and that therefore this political football, if you will, just goes back and forth between the parties, between the states.

**Mayor Adams:** I say in New York City, we have 8.8 million people, but we got 30 million opinions. And no matter what you do in this great city, you're going to have yaysayers and naysayers. Here's the facts of the matter: we receive over 22,000 people that came to our city in a city that was already dealing with housing crises after the pandemic. Not one child slept on the street. Not one family slept on the street. We not only fulfilled our legal obligation of allowing people to have a roof over their heads, but we went beyond that and fulfilled our moral obligation. We incorporated children into our school system. We ensured that they had three meals a day, healthcare, eyeglasses, mental health services. So we fulfilled the obligation.

**McElvoy:** The gap, it seems to me, is between this intense pressure on the system in cities like New York at the moment and what needs to happen down the line. You've called on federal government to allow migrants permission to work sooner, but that realistically takes time to implement. Long term plans for housing take a very long time to come through, whether that's in London or New York. So although you've got a national problem that's pressing at the moment, it's very much your problem in New York now. So what is your backup plan for doing more than you are telling me you've already been able to implement?

**Mayor Adams:** Yes, it is my problem. And you know what? I want this problem. This is an opportunity to help those who are long term New Yorkers and help those who are coming to this great country. There's a reason the Statue of Liberty sits in our harbor. This is who we are as Americans. And so number one, we have a system called FHEPS vouchers. This allows people who are long term New Yorkers that are living in shelters to transition into permanent housing. We've announced some major projects of building new housing in this city to meet the demand, but we need our local electors to also embrace this and not embrace a concept of don't build in my backyard. This is a moment that all New Yorkers and all Americans must step up and show that we are who we say we are.

**McElvoy:** I've noted that and I want to come back to possible solutions and challenges on the housing problem in just a moment. But something I did want to ask you about, Mr. Mayor, is the legal obligation of the city which is to provide a bed to anyone who asks under something called the right to shelter. Now, you've suggested that that law be reviewed. What do you think needs changing? And is it still fit for purpose in the situation that you find yourself in in New York today?

**Mayor Adams:** What we really were calling for lawmakers to look at is the hours in which you have to carry out the action. Trust me, when we had the right to shelter law years ago in our city, no one thought you would be inundated with the volume that we were inundated with.

**McElvoy:** But nonetheless, you've questioned whether the right to shelter as it's currently enshrined in law is serviceable at the moment. I suppose my question, question to you is why and what is it that you would like to see differently?

**Mayor Adams:** Decades ago when it was created, this form of a crisis of asylum seekers coming to a city, that was never a part of the concept of right to shelter, and that is what we were talking about. There should be some form of leeway. There should be some form of understanding when you're dealing with a crisis.

**McElvoy:** Do you think then that the federal authorities really should be doing more at the border? And how do you see that balance?

**Mayor Adams:** Oh, I think it's crucial. We need a bipartisan immigration policy in this country and we called on the White House to have a decompression strategy. They did. So we went from seeing anywhere from six to 10 buses a day down to maybe one or two a week. It really allowed us to see this issue handled at the border and that's where it should be handled and we want to continue to see a bipartisan agreement on immigration. It makes no sense that we allow people in the country and we tell them that they cannot work until six months, although they may have the skills to fill jobs, the skills to contribute to the economy. That policy's a broken policy. We need a long term and a proactive strategy to deal with this issue, and that includes Congress passing legislation that will allow asylum seekers to legally work and provide an emergency financial relief for our city.

**McElvoy:** The migrant influx presents an opportunity to make the wider housing crisis a priority, and you've written an article for The Economist's World Ahead publication which will be out later in the month on your way of going about fixing it. Why is housing such a problem in New York? And I'm going to be quite annoying, I guess, and say if you want to boil down your answer to a single thought, what is it?

**Mayor Adams:** Number one, the cost of the supplies, the raw material have almost tripled. And there's some of the policies in laws. We had a law here called 421-a. It was an incentive for developers to build. This law was not renewed. It had a major impact on our housing. And then we have a system in this city, it's called members deference. So a local Council person can veto housing in their district. We see this often and it's something that can get in the way of the housing that the city needs, and it's something that we have to often navigate. We have several projects that we are looking at now that's going to bring 1,100 units of housing. A substantial number of those units are going to be affordable and deeply affordable. But we're having a challenge with the local council person who is not willing to have the housing built there.

**McElvoy:** You believe the fix is YIMBY-ism, which was a new one on me, but it's Yes in My Back Yard as opposed to better-known NIMBY-ism, which is No in My Back Yard. So how do you turn New York's very loud, ingrained NIMBY-ism into YIMBY-ism?

**Mayor Adams:** We must be clear to the public that housing is all of our obligation. Every New Yorker would say that they believe everyone should have a right to housing, but then they turn around in some voice and say, "Well, as long as it's not on my block, as long as it's not near my school, as long as it's not near my park." We want those numerical minority that is opposed to housing to join the overwhelming majority of New Yorkers that understand this is a problem we all must solve and everyone has a right to housing.

**McElvoy:** That is a very difficult change to effect. And the numbers from the Mayor's Management Report itself shows that in your first six months in office, the amount of new

affordable housing has declined by just under 50 percent compared with the previous fiscal year. Are you really saying, "I'm not able to do more faster because of this ingrained NIMBY-ism."

**Mayor Adams:** There are many rivers that get in the way of building housing and we have to dam each river. NIMBY-ism is one of the rivers, but we have other things, such as staffing. And then we have real racism around redlining and we need to ensure that government is working without the bureaucracy that has historically got in the way of building housing.

**McElvoy:** Let's move on to crime and policing. You campaigned to become mayor on the pledge that you'd keep the city safe. And murders are down by around 14 percent since last year and crime is a lot lower than it was in its peak in the early 1990s. And yet, many New Yorkers that I talk to say that they feel unsafe. And this perception does seem to have become a problem in and of itself.

**Mayor Adams:** I'm a big believer that it takes a while before what you felt becomes what you feel, and we need a combination of bringing down those other, what we call, predatory crimes to match the success we've had around shootings and homicides. When I ran for office, I was clear I wanted to go after gun violence and I wanted to go after the murders and I wanted to focus on what was happening in our subway system to deal with those six felonies we experience a day in our subway system.

**McElvoy:** This is quite the list, Mr. Mayor. If you don't mind, it does bring me to, you mentioned the subway, and of course you were a former transit cop yourself. You and Governor Kathy Hochul have announced a plan to combat crime on the subway by increasing the number of police officers patrolling the system. So far, so good. But you've said that you'll do this by asking police to work more overtime shifts. And many critics, including the police union, have said, "This is unsustainable." Why do you think it's going to work?

**Mayor Adams:** I did this before as a transit police officer. I was one of those officers that did two hours overtime every night. We're fighting against the feeling and we're fighting against the actual crimes. That uniform is a symbol of safety. And so we have to recapture the feeling that people are safer in our subway system, and this is sustainable because we're going to focus on it.

**McElvoy:** But it's not a long term solution, is it? Simply sort of sweating the assets and having police work more shifts?

**Mayor Adams:** You do it when you have a feeling of disorder. It is so important to have officers utilize overtime to deal with the feeling of disorder that people were experiencing. I heard New Yorkers, and New Yorkers stated that, "Mayor, we would like to see more police officers." And that's an immediate fix to how New Yorkers are feeling as we increase our ridership. And there are many rivers, as I state, to feed the sea of violence, and we must have an upstream and downstream, proactive and reactive response to policing and public safety. And that's what we're doing.

**McElvoy:** I must quickly ask you to touch on something else which can fuel violence, and that is, of course, gun violence, gun ownership. Very briefly, has the Supreme Court's decision to strike down New York State Rifle and Pistol Association v. Bruen, which extended the right to bear arms outside the home. Has that affected gun violence in your city?

**Mayor Adams:** We have yet to see the full blow of that. One thing that's clear, we have an activist court that is clearly out of alignment with what the American people were looking for. And so we're going to continue to use our laws here to make sure that these laws do not hurt people in our city.

**McElvoy:** I have just come back from the U.S. before this interview, and of course the subject that is in the headlines is on television screens day in, day out at the moment has been that attack on the husband of the speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi. A man's been charged with attempted homicide for that. It's one example of increasing political violence, because it does appear that that attack was also or perhaps primarily aimed at her, and it was just a chance that she was not in the house at the time. Is this subject, as distressing as it is, one that you are concerned about deepening the rift between Republicans and Democrats in the way that they respond to this sort of urgent challenge?

**Mayor Adams:** Extremism is hurting our country, and that extremism is on both sides of the aisle. Every day, Americans and New Yorkers are being held hostage by that. What happened in this case is really a reflection and an indictment of the dialogue has spiraled out of control.

**McElvoy:** But it is spiraling out of control and it's less than a week until the midterms. The incumbent Democrat governor of New Yorker, Kathy Hochul, is locked in battle with Lee Zeldin, her Republican challenger, and the polls appear to show that that race is narrowing. Why is the contest so close? And does it show Democrats losing their grip on what was such a solidly blue state?

**Mayor Adams:** We cannot allow who we are as Democrats — if I'm speaking specifically as a Democrat — we cannot allow who we are to be hijacked by those who are on the extreme end of our parties. Democrats believe in public safety. That's why we fought for the crime bill. That's why we fought to pass gun control measures. That's why we fought not to defund police, but give police the resources they need. It was the Republican Party that didn't vote for these things.

**McElvoy:** Yes, but Republicans are improving their margin among Black voters, among Hispanic voters, working class voters, including in New York City. How much of a concern do you think that should be for Democrats? And do Democrats need to be a bit more self-critical about their record?

**Mayor Adams:** The Democrats, they have a responsibility to have clarity of their message, the good message that they stand for. Everything from healthcare to public safety to quality education. Don't allow the extreme end of the parties that run on bumper stickers like defund the police to hijack their entire message. That is what has happened, and I believe that Democrats must be very clear on what we stand for, and we stand for everyday blue collar working class people in this city and this country, and they've lost that narrative by the loudest, who are the far left of the party.

**McElvoy:** You dubbed yourself once, I think, the new face of the Democratic Party. I remember that. Clearly that's what you are aiming for in this sort of answer. But do you think, one, that can be replicated? And two, that contest with the left of the party over ideas. Defund the police

became a bit of the talking point, but there's more. Are you honestly convinced that you are winning that argument to the extent that you can re-convince voters?

**Mayor Adams:** It's not the left, because the left is doable. It's the far left. It's those that want to disband police departments, those that are completely anti-business, those that believe we should open all jails and let everyone out. Democrats can be bold and big while still getting stuff done every day, and perfect cannot be the enemy of progress. And so I want to be clear, I consider myself to be a practical progressive. And I have left-leaning ideas, but I know that we need to deliver for the American people, and that's the message that the Democratic party must get out and not the message that the far left has hijacked.

**McElvoy:** One final question for you, Mr. Adams. You're going to have to pick a favorite here. New York is so well known for the songs, the books, and the films that it inspires. What do you reckon is your city's best cultural asset?

**Mayor Adams:** I think our theater is a magnet that pulls us all into its gravitational pull. That's a symbol of New York, a grinding attitude to get the job done, and I'm just a symbol of the grinding attitude of New Yorkers.

**McElvoy:** Thank you so much indeed. Eric Adams, thank you for joining us.

**Mayor Adams:** Thank you. Take care.

###