

Transcript: Mayor Eric Adams Appears Live on MSNBC's "Morning Joe"

May 31, 2022

Willie Geist: Joining us now here in New York is New York City Mayor Eric Adams. He's co-chair of Mayors Against Illegal Guns, a nonpartisan coalition of more than a thousand mayors that works within Every Town for Gun Safety. The mayors are asking the Senate to take action on gun reform in the wake of the mass shootings in Uvalde and in Buffalo.

Geist: Mr. Mayor, great to see you. Thanks for being with us. I was thinking, as we talk about the funerals this week of 10, 11 year olds, that you've had to deal with that yourself as a mayor. We had an 11 year old girl shot and killed in the Bronx just last week. What do you propose to do in your city first, and then we can talk about the country about stopping gun violence?

Mayor Adams: And that's important. And at the top of the show, the mayor, Mayor McLaughlin, I'm going to call him today because this is a mayor's battle. Mayors are being impacted by that. And here in New York, we saw just last week two guns outside a school. Inside a school, a young man had two loaded, 15 years old, had two loaded guns in his backpack. We also saw another child the next day that had a loaded gun in his backpack. He was 13.

Mayor Adams: And so, we wanted to focus on several different ways. Number one. My Neighborhood Safety Team. We took 2,900 guns off the streets since I have been the mayor. That's unimaginable. And in addition to that, we are making sure that we continue to have the drills with our school safety officers inside our schools, school safety agents inside our schools to be prepared. And we are. So, the goal is to go after those guns but also stop the pipeline that are feeding children to carry guns.

Geist: We've been focused on the AR-15, other semiautomatic rifles because of the horrific damage they can do so quickly, as evidenced, again, a week ago in Uvalde,

Texas. But as you know, the overwhelming majority of gun violence takes place with handguns in this country, particularly in New York City. How do you stop that?

Mayor Adams: And you hit it right on the head. We've ignored the real crisis. The crisis in America is the handgun. That's what Chicago is experiencing. San Francisco, Atlanta, New York. So. There's several, I like to say, rivers that feed this crisis. Number one. We have to deal with the ghost gun issue. Right now, laws have not caught up to the creativity of bad guys. The ghost guns that are disassembled, we need to treat them as real guns. We need to look at the shipment of the parts, that is very important to do so. Second, we have to really look at the ruling that's about to come out of the Supreme Court. Open carry is a crisis. Can you imagine being on the four train as someone openly carrying a firearm? And then, we need to have the coordination between our ATF. Right now, we only have 2,400 ATF agents in our entire country.

Mayor Adams: About 60 of them are here in New York. We have to double their size. We have to get a leader there so we could do information sharing like we do every day in New York to talk about the dangers of people carrying guns and focus on gangs. That's how we're taking these guns off the street. That's why we have a 30% decrease in shootings in the city during the month of April. We're looking at that same pathway in the month of May because we have precision policing on the dangerous people that are carrying guns and using guns, but we got to keep them off the streets. That's part of the problem.

Geist: Mr. Mayor, Joe was here with a question for you. Joe.

Joe Scarborough: Mr. Mayor, thanks so much for coming and talking today. We have, of course, a national crisis. We have, right now, Democrats trying to get Republicans to agree on an issue that 85% of Americans support, that is universal background checks. And what I would love for you to explain to everybody across America that's watching right now is how this is a national problem. It is not a state problem. You can pass all the laws you want, the gun safety laws you want in New York City, but talk about this stream of illegal weapons that are bought in other states that have more lax laws regarding gun safety, have more lax laws regarding background checks, and how those guns get into New York City. Those guns get into Chicago that this is a national problem that needs to be addressed by an expansive universal background checking system.

Mayor Adams: And you're so right. This problem is not a local problem. It's not in New York, it's not Atlanta, a Chicago problem. This is a national crisis and we have not been attacking this as a national crisis. New York city, we have strong gun laws that we may lose through the Supreme Court. But we have strong gun laws. But when you allow guns to be purchased in Georgia, and Atlanta, and other localities, and then they're brought into the inner city through the iron pipeline, that's a real problem.

Mayor Adams: Look what they just did in Atlanta. In Atlanta, they basically dismantled all the rules around background checks and identification. That's an issue that we must face. But background checks must go further than just looking at someone's ID. We need the social media industry to be part of this using artificial intelligence to identify those who are using dangerous terms, so we can conduct proper background checks. Not only what's on paper and documented, but what they're doing in social media.

Scarborough: Mr. Mayor, I also want to talk about something that you've seen far too much of. And that is young people dying, children dying. At the top of the show, we told our viewers a statistic that if you add up all the numbers of police officers who were killed in the line of duty last year, add up all of the troops, U.S. troops that were killed in combat. If you add up the number of Black Americans who were killed by police officers, add up the number of all Americans that were killed by police officers, and put all these numbers together that still would not equal the number of children who were killed by guns last year.

Scarborough: And we talk about obviously, and we should talk about all of these issues but for some reason, a two year old dies in the Bronx and that's a local story, but it doesn't catch the attention of everybody. Or in Chicago, so many people die every weekend in Chicago. And it reminds me of what you were talking about during the campaign. You said we focus on the AR-15 deaths because they're so horrific. You said, but you all don't understand. This is a battle we have to fight day in and day out because of the proliferation of guns in New York City and all across America. Talk about that tragedy.

Mayor Adams: And it's clear the number one killer of young people are the guns. That's clear. And we have basically normalized young people dying from gun violence. And it's unfortunate that many of these killings are taking place in poor Black and brown communities. And we have not considered this the crisis that it is. And it's ironic that some who advocate to stop killings in other areas have totally ignored, which is the

largest number of killings from guns. And that is why I refuse to go with politically expedient or politically popular. We need to be honest about this issue and we need to have a concerted effort to really stem this tide. We have not acknowledged this issue and to his credit, President Biden is really the first president that has really turned us into a national narrative, not when the mass shootings take place, but throughout the entire year, he's talking about Chicago, New York, and Atlanta. We were not hearing that coming out of the White House in previous presidents throughout the years.

Jonathan Lemire: So, Mayor Adams, you mentioned the need for more ATF agents. We should note, there's not an ATF director currently. President Biden's nominee has yet to be confirmed by the Senate beyond, of course, being mayor, you served in the police for a long time. You know how difficult these moments are when an active shooter is present. But tell us, there's been so many questions raised about the response of the law enforcement there in that small town of Texas. What's your assessment as to what they should have done differently?

Mayor Adams: Well, it's even the public safety head in Texas indicated there were real mistakes there. That is not going to happen in New York. We go in with an active shooter, not only would the police go in with an active shooter, but the FDNY, the EMS, they're trained to go in with an active shooter. It appears as though this was treated more like a barricaded armed person or a hostage negotiation scenario instead of an active shooter. Here in New York City, well trained, deep intelligence, the goal is to go in and stop that immediate threat right away.

Elise Jordan: Mr. Mayor, one of the goals of Mayors Against Illegal Guns is taking on the gun lobby to some extent and gun manufacturers and making sure that there is some repercussion for these guns that they have. The lobby has been pretty much unscathed from liability. How is your coalition taking on that problem?

Mayor Adams: Well, we were armed with a new weapon. And that is Senator Zellnor Myrie's bill. It seems to have passed. The court indicated that we can sue gun manufacturers and others who improperly are using tactics to sell and over proliferate our cities with guns. That's an important tool and we want to continue to lean into that, but our goal is to do lobbying in several areas. Let's go to our federal lawmakers, but let's also mobilize the families and cities that are being impacted by this, because the mayors are seeing this every day. And we know this is a fight that we must lead. We are at the tip of the spear, because these guns are impacting our cities and communities.

And when I spoke with the mayor of San Francisco, the mayor of Chicago, the mayor of Atlanta, we're all having the same problem with these guns that just saturate our cities.

Geist: This is a big problem that you're working on. And it's one of the main reasons you were elected mayor. If you look at the polling after the fact, the biggest issue for people is public safety, is crime. I want to feel better walking through my city and riding the subway. There have been many high profile incidents on the subway, the shooting death of a man going to brunch a couple of weeks ago, stabbings, all the things that we associate with the 1980s, in New York City. How do you make the subway system in this city safer?

Mayor Adams: Exactly what we're doing. We were criticized for going in and removing the encampments, removing the homelessness, the feeling of disorder, but we knew it was the right thing to do. First week, only 22 people took us up on our offers and leave and live in a decent environment. Now we're up to over, close to a thousand people that took us up on that, but also putting police officers there. Omnipresence is the key. And we are going to continue to evolve to get more and more officers out of desk duties, into the subway system to deal with the feeling of disorder. And then, zero in on those who are impacting our quality of life. We stopped going after people who jump the turnstiles, wrong thing to do. We caught a person that was carrying a loaded firearm when he jumped the turnstile. When you don't pay your fare, you also go in there in many cases, to carry out an illegal action. So we're dealing with quality of life and zeroing in on those dangerous people in our subway system. And we're going to see the results of that.

Geist: And one of the headwinds that you face is that, we were talking about this in the commercial break as you sat down, there are so many people who commit those crimes. When they're arrested, we'll hear, "He's got a rap sheet of 20 arrests, 30 arrests, 40 arrests, and beat somebody up on the subway, an innocent victim." What do you do about that part of the problem, when you do seem to have this revolving door of criminals?

Mayor Adams: And it's on several levels. Our level one, our criminal justice system is bottlenecked. It's time to get back the court up and operated, so that we could get dangerous people off the street. When you arrest someone on Monday, for carrying a gun and they back out Tuesday, you are really defeating the purpose. During the '80s as you talked about – during the '80s, everyone was playing on the same team. We had lawmakers, judges and police all playing on the same team. We don't appear to be

there right now. And we need to get back playing on the same team, protecting innocent people in this city and this country. And that is our focus. We're going to do our job, as I stated, 2,900 guns off the streets. My Neighborhood Safety Team has been successful. We're seeing a 30% decrease in shootings. So we are doing our job. Now we have to keep the bad guys off the streets.

Geist: And obviously Joe, very frustrating for a New York City police officer to arrest the same person two, three, four, five times.

Scarborough: So frustrating. And it is frustrating also for politicians and elected officials who want to get things done. And they have others who are dragging their feet and not letting them pass the sort of reforms that will keep the streets safe, that will keep the subway safe. Mr Mayor, let me ask you about military style weapons. As a former cop, as a guy who's been in law enforcement for most of your life. Obviously again, the numbers are driven.

Scarborough: The shooting deaths are driven mainly by handguns, as you said. At the same time, we have situations, whether it's in Parkland or whether it's in Uvalde or whether it's in Buffalo, where a good man with a gun or a good woman with a gun's not enough to stop an 18 year old kid, that's carrying a weapon that was designed specifically for war. Talk about your attitude. Talk about law enforcement officer's attitude towards AR-15s and these weapons that were designed for war. I know that with a 50/50 Senate, there's not going to be any further restrictions on the purchasing of those weapons for a while, most likely, but talk about law enforcement officers. What sort of disadvantage do they put you in?

Mayor Adams: Oh, it's an extreme disadvantage. And there's several scenarios, Joe, that you mentioned that we really need to look at. Number one, we have to start training, stop the bleed training, because those bullets will cause a different level of bleeding in first aid that's needed. So we have to have an extensive stop the bleed training for those types of bullets. Number two, in these scenarios, know what else we missed? These guys are wearing tactical, bulletproof vests. So that officer coming with a 9mm, as we saw in Buffalo, I was at the funeral over the weekend in Buffalo. He was struck and he was able to continue, because he's wearing a high capacity bulletproof vest, that the officers that are really outside our SWAT or high level of ESU teams, we're carrying nine millimeters on patrol. That's a different fight that you're up against.

Mayor Adams: It's equivalent to how we transform from .38 to 9mm, because the bad guys were overpowering the police. Now we're at that scenario again, where you're seeing the vests, the training. And then that third scenario, you are seeing online, where there are individuals who are tutoring and training people how to carry out these actions. So the onslaught of just information, equipment, high capacity bullets, and AK-47s, you can now buy through ghost guns and make them at home. You can buy them easily in our stores. America is up against a real battle and Congress must stop thinking that we are not up against a crisis. And so, I take my hat off to those senators that are going to be talking later today to say, it's time to come together and resolve this national crisis.

Geist: And I know you'll continue to push for some action, as you see the real impact in your city. New York City Mayor Eric Adams, also the co-chair of Mayors Against Illegal Guns. Mr. Mayor, thanks for being here today.

Mayor Adams: Thank you.

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