

Transcript: Mayor Eric Adams, Gun Violence Prevention Task Force Co-Chair A.T. Mitchell Appear Live on PIX 11's Morning News

June 9, 2022

Dan Mannarino: In New York City, Mayor Adams and the new gun violence prevention czar are joining us live from City Hall this morning. So good morning to both of you. Thank you for being here on PIX11.

Mayor Eric Adams: Yes. Good morning.

A.T. Mitchell, Co-chair of the Gun Violence Prevention Task Force: Good morning.

Dan Mannarino: And Mr. Mayor, let me begin with you right now first with your trip to Washington. The House yesterday passing gun legislation, unexpected to pass in this — as they look to come to an agreement on strengthening what they say is red flag laws, background checks. Will that at all help the actual gun problem? What were the conversations you had with lawmakers?

Mayor Adams: What was revealing to me, Dan, is that America is divided into three pieces. The extremes are the smallest number. We have the far left that believes that no matter what a person is doing and carrying guns, they should not be held accountable. Then you have the far right that they're stating that everyone should have a gun and we should not have any common sense gun laws. They are shooting at each other. And the everyday overwhelming number of New Yorkers and Americans are caught in the middle. We need sensible gun laws. And what was passed in Congress yesterday is a starting point. We can't continue to be on the fringe edges of this problem. We see what's happening in Buffalo and Texas and other parts of our country. We have to get to the heart of the problem.

Mannarino: Yeah.

Hazel Sanchez: Yeah. And we hear about deadly shootings here in the city pretty much every day. And you said yesterday that the NYPD has actually taken over about 3,000 guns off the streets. And then they continue to come into New York and you quipped back at a Georgia congressman that guns are actually coming from Georgia. So without these tougher laws, how do you stop the flow on what we call the iron pipeline?

Mayor Adams: A combination of things. Number one, we need those tough laws that we're talking about. As I say, we have to damn every river that feeds the sea of violence, but we can't create new rivers. The Supreme Court is about to do the right to carry. That is creating another river and is going to continue the flow of guns in our city. What we need is help from the federal government to put in place stricter laws going after those straw purchases, background checks, red flag laws, and we need to be bold enough to ban the AK-47. You don't need an assault rifle to shoot rabbits. Let's make sure we stop the sale of these weapons.

Mannarino: So Mr. Mayor, you are joined this morning right there to your left by Andre T. Mitchell. So before we get to Andre, why did you feel that appointing a gun prevention czar was the way to go when you already have something like a deputy mayor for public safety and of course the police commissioner? What will the focus be?

Mayor Adams: Dan, you almost answered your own question. You mentioned the government's role, deputy mayor, police commissioner, those are governmental officials. What was missing is the partnership with people who are on the ground. I've known A.T. for over 35 years. He has been in this work. He's knowledgeable of this work. And now we have a partnership. He's co-chairing this task force with a deputy mayor. It's an important partnership that we needed.

Sanchez: Well, Mr. Mitchell, thank you for joining us on the PIX11 morning news for the first time. You are the founder of Man Up!, a Brooklyn anti-violence group. So how do you see taking your past experience and using it to problem solve on the streets?

Mitchell: Well, I think what I would do is work alongside of so many others that are in the city that work in the communities, like I come from in Brooklyn, and really go actually after the problem at the core by reaching those individuals who are, unfortunately, possibly contemplating to use a gun and convincing them and to not get engaged in that

type of activity. That's the work that we do. That's the work that we do as community-based organizations. And so that's what I believe would be our approach.

Mannarino: Yeah. And that's where your experience really is. You know, Mr. Mitchell, you're out there on the ground level. The mayor said this was needed. So we're seeing more guns, more shootings, young children being shot, people shot in their homes. We saw it play out in Queens this week. What are you, Mr. Mitchell, hearing on the ground level right now about where all of this is coming from and why it's happening?

Mitchell: Well, on the ground, a lot of people don't know where all of this is coming from, honestly. It seems like it's a storm. I mean, this is something that we are dealing with every single day. We have been for some while. But we are actually more eager to get to hopefully be able to resolve it and then turn the tide around.

Mayor Adams: And Dan, as I said previously, when you think about it, the New York City Police Department removed over 3,000 guns off our streets. We witnessed some success, 30% decrease in shootings, 30% decrease in homicides. We are trending in the right direction. This combination is going to assist us even more.

Sanchez: Okay. And what's so disturbing is not only are the victims getting younger, the people that are shooting these guns are getting younger. How critical is it for you to reach them at a young age to spread this message?

Mitchell: It's extremely critical. I mean, these are young people. These are babies who are unfortunately being convinced to get into this lifestyle. And so for us, it's personal and it's something that we found it to be urgent. That's why we are working like the mayor said in partnership with the city and with the school system and others to make sure that we reach our young people before they even engage.

Mayor Adams: I have never in my professional career as a police officer and a lawmaker witnessed the, one, easy accessibility of a gun, two, the willingness to use the gun at any time, daylight or in the evening, and thirdly, unfortunately, is the unsuccessful ways we are using our criminal justice system. We are not prosecuting dangerous people at the level that we should be doing it. That's the perfect storm of violence.

Mannarino: So you got to the prosecution level. You saw it played out in San Francisco. They had a recall for their democratic district attorney, Mr. Mayor. So when you look at what's playing out here in New York City, are you confident in the back end of this, what's happening within the courts and the prosecutions?

Mayor Adams: No, I'm not. I believe that we have to meet the threat on the ground with the level of urgency that everyday New Yorkers are experiencing. And that means opening our court system, expeditiously have a fair trial so we can determine the guilt or innocence of people involved. That means that we need to look at some of the laws that we have on the books and make sure that we are putting violent people away until they serve their time. And it also means that judges must do their jobs and ensure that people who are eligible to be held inside are held inside.

Mannarino: What about the DAs?

Mayor Adams: We can't continue to have dangerous people on our streets. And I partner without district attorneys. And we have been having amazing conversations and they are real wins. We saw in the Bronx, Darcel Clark, the district attorney, took down several gang members. We saw the arrest of those who are gun traffickers. We saw what DA Gonzalez has done. And as much as people want to criticize him, we are seeing what DA Bragg is doing as well.

Sanchez: Yeah, and Mr. Mayor, as a person that lives in this city, I know a lot of us are already talking about that. Now it's getting warmer. We know what's going to happen. You spoke about this on our show about gun violence on the rights, especially during summertime. So what exactly is your game plan as we head into the summer?

Mayor Adams: A combination of things. I've stated it on the campaign trail and I will continue to say we were not deploying our personnel in the manner that I believe met the threat on the streets. We are moving officers out of civilian roles and putting them back on patrol. We're utilizing the manpower at peaceful events like parades. You're going to see a major decrease in the number of officers assigned to that. We are focusing on our police officers doing the job of public safety. Even in our transit system, we're going to continue to increase and make sure we have that omnipresence that gives the energy of fighting crime and people feeling safe in their transportation system.

Mannarino: Mr. Mayor, I listened very carefully to your testimony yesterday. It was emotional at times and it's an emotional time for the country. So it was very fitting that there was all that passion behind it. But if there is inaction coming out of Washington, what are your options? And I'm curious for Mr. Mitchell as well. If there are laws that do not change, what happens next?

Mayor Adams: Well said. And Dan, I say this over and over again, if you look at the laws that were passed in the last few years, there were laws that were passed for people who commit crimes. When are we going to pass laws for people who don't commit crimes? When are we going to start focusing on innocent New Yorkers and Americans? It's time for us to focus on them. And so we know we're not getting the help that we deserve. But we are going to do what exactly A.T. stated. We're going to do our job here because no matter what happens outside this city, it's my obligation to keep New Yorkers safe and I'm going to do that.

Sanchez: So what do you want to say to New Yorkers who are losing confidence at this point when we hear about shootings every day?

Mayor Adams: Well, I think the city is resilient and I believe that even when you look at the poll, I don't know when people determine the word fair means that they have given up. It's not. The 64% of New Yorkers are saying Eric is doing fair or better. And that is where we ought to be because we have to convince New Yorkers that the city is going to be safe and come out of COVID. We are doing that. Decreasing shooters, decreasing homicide, a hundred thousand new jobs. We moved from being stable to optimistic on our economy. 95% of hotels are returning. Our city is winning. We're winning, and we're going to make sure New Yorkers know that. They're going to start feeling it as well as seeing the results of our plans.

Mannarino: We'll leave it with that. Mr. Mayor. I guess, A.T. Can we call you A.T.? I keep hearing them calling you A.T.

Mitchell: You're welcome to, Dan. It's a pleasure for you to call me A.T.

Mannarino: Okay, there you go.

Sanchez: All right.

Mannarino: Mr. Mayor, A.T., thank you both for being here this morning. Appreciate it.

Mitchell: Thank you for having us.

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