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**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR ERIC ADAMS INTERVIEWS WITH CNN'S CHRIS WALLACE**

*Note this interview is now available in full on HBO Max.*

**Chris Wallace:** Mayor Eric Adams, thank you so much for coming in. It's a pleasure to sit down with you.

**Mayor Eric Adams:** The pleasure is mine. Good to speak with you.

**Wallace:** Well, let's start with some of the problems. New York City has seen a flood of migrants since April, thousands of them. Venezuelans escaping the economic collapse in that country. It's so bad that you recently had to state of emergency. What do you think is behind the surge of people coming into the country illegally and ending up here in New York City?

**Mayor Adams:** It's clearly a crisis created by human hands. The manner in which it was carried out by particularly the governor of Texas, Governor Abbott — his refusals really just to communicate, coordinate. In April this started. We discovered the buses were coming and we immediately jumped into action. As of today, we have about 20,500 that have come through our care. About 15,500 are still in our care.

**Wallace:** But the Democratic mayor of El Paso has, since August, bused 11,000 people who came into the country illegally here to New York City. So it's not just the Republican governor, it's also the Democratic mayor.

**Mayor Adams:** And that's really interesting, because what happened was the governor of Texas put in place the blueprint and others started to duplicate and copy that blueprint. And that's what I stated. When we first discovered this has become a method to use, to really politicize what has happened to asylum seekers and migrants. I spoke to the mayor of El Paso and sent a team down to Texas. What was different here was that Governor Abbott did not want to communicate and actually lied — stated that he did communicate or we did not reach out, which was untrue.

**Wallace:** National Republican leaders aren't apologizing for this, mayor. They say it's high time that northern Democratic mayors like yourself had to deal personally, just as they do, the red state governors and mayors, with the big problem at the border. Check it out.

(Audio plays.)

**U.S. Senator John Cornyn:** It's really a good idea of Governor Ducey, Governor DeSantis, Governor Abbott to try to get the attention of some of the nation's mayors.

**U.S. Senator Marco Rubio:** ... Sharing the burden. This is a national responsibility. It should be a national burden.

**U.S. Senator Mitch McConnell:** I personally thought it was a good idea.

(Audio ends.)

**Wallace:** Do they have a point?

**Mayor Adams:** No, they don't. When you do a real analysis, New York State, we already deal with those asylum seekers and migrants. We have some of the largest numbers. This has always been a state and city that we are open to those who are fleeing persecution and prosecution. There's a reason the Statue of Liberty sits in our harbor, because all of our lineage comes from somewhere.

**Wallace:** But mayor, you talk about Republican governors, you talk about Republican senators. What I haven't heard you talk about is Joe Biden. The fact is, since he took office, the illegal immigration problem in this country has exploded. More than two million arrests at the border in a single year for the first time in our history. Obviously, the people that weren't arrested and got through, a lot more than that. I guess the question is what responsibility does President Biden bear for this influx of migrants, first of all, over the border, and then ending up in places like New York City?

**Mayor Adams:** Well, I want to be clear. As we were talking about, I didn't indicate what party Governor Abbott belonged to. I felt his action was wrong. This is a humanitarian crisis that was created by human hands. I stated over and over again that this national problem must be settled on a national level. We must have a real decompression strategy. We must make sure the entire country absorbs what is happening with migrant and asylum seekers. I believe the president responded to that and ensured that we are looking at a decompression strategy that's going to start in Mexico. And I think it's the right thing to do the way the president has started.

**Wallace:** But mayor, if you look at the record... First of all, President Biden's significantly scaled back on enforcement of unaccompanied minors coming across the border. He has now ended the Remain in Mexico policy in which asylum seekers had to wait for their asylum adjudication in Mexico as opposed to in this country. What responsibility does Joe Biden bear for this flood of illegal immigration?

**Mayor Adams:** I think it is a bipartisan responsibility. We must sit down at the table and have a clear pathway for those seeking to experience the American dream. I think we have failed to do that for generations. I'm hoping with the decompression strategy and the real strategy that the White House has put in place, we are finally going to deal with number one, allowing those who are here to work to give the financial resources to those who are really carrying the responsibility of those who are coming here to our country.

**Wallace:** I'm going to just try one more time. What grade would you give Joe Biden for his immigration policy to this point in 2022, almost two years in?

**Mayor Adams:** I'm a terrible grader. I think I give our entire bipartisanship... We have failed to do it properly for generations. And to state merely that this president has failed to do so, is just inadequate. We all must come to the table and decide a pathway for those who have legal citizenship in this country and ensure those who are dangerous to this country are not coming to this country. Because some people will exploit that.

**Wallace:** When you were elected mayor, you called yourself the quote 'New face of the Democratic Party.' I'm sure you remember saying that.

**Mayor Adams:** Yes, I do.

**Wallace:** I remember it.

**Mayor Adams:** I still feel that way.

**Wallace:** That you're the new face of the Democratic Party? Well, let me ask you a question. What does that mean?

**Mayor Adams:** First, I need to say, just to know, I am the face. I think that in our country we have allowed the far extremes on the far left and the far right to hijack what everyday Americans and New Yorkers want. And that's what it's about. It's about we can't remain silent when it's dealing with those issues that are impacting the overwhelming number of working people in this country around public safety, around housing, around education. All of those bread and butter, kitchen table issues. Someone must speak on behalf of that and that's what I'm going to represent in this country.

**Wallace:** But if you're the face of the new Democratic Party, how does that differ from the old Democratic Party?

**Mayor Adams:** I like to say the face of the Democratic Party.

**Wallace:** You did say new Democratic Party.

**Mayor Adams:** I don't know if the term is exactly new or old. I think that for a long time the Democratic message has been ignored and we've allowed the far left to determine what that message is. That is untrue. Even when we look at Defund the Police, that was not a call by the mainstream radically practical Democrats I like to classify myself as. Republicans took that message, hijacked that message, and made it appear as though that was the message of the Democratic Party. Even the president called for proper funding of the police. And in fact, Republicans blocked some of the funding that we wanted. So if anybody's defunding police, it's the Republican Party and not the Democrats. Democrats believe in public safety, believe in education, and believe in ensuring that we're looking after working New Yorkers and Americans.

**Wallace:** We're going to get to crime in a moment, but I just want to talk about your political standing. Because you did come in and people thought, "Well, this is kind of the new raging moderate in the Democratic Party." You've taken some hits since then. I want to put up some polls. In January, 63 percent of New Yorkers had a favorable view of you while 20 percent said unfavorable. But in the most recent poll, 29 percent say you're doing a good or excellent job as mayor, while 64 percent say fair or poor. Those numbers have just flipped.

**Mayor Adams:** No, they didn't. Think about it for a moment. Look at that poll. Tell me when fair is failure?

**Wallace:** Well, I know, but that's what... So you're saying fair is okay?

**Mayor Adams:** I'm saying fair is people saying that when that poll came out, "Hey, this guy has been in office for a few months with decades of problem." The pollster took poor and fair and put it together. If you're in New York and the overwhelming number of New Yorkers are saying you are fair, good, or excellent, let me tell you something, if you know New York City, that's a darn good statement to say about you.

**Wallace:** So fair, you view as an endorsement?

**Mayor Adams:** Yeah, I believe fair is saying, give the guy a chance that's dealing with decades of homelessness, decades of school failure, decades of crime issues, decades of homelessness. Anyone that has a corporation as large as New York City with a \$101 billion budget, to think you can turn around a ship moving in the wrong direction in a few months, that doesn't make sense.

**Wallace:** Honestly, has the job of mayor been tougher than you thought it would be?

**Mayor Adams:** Not at all. Not at all. I went into this job understanding the complexities of it because I spent 22 years on the front line of the challenges of this city as a police officer. The job is not as tough as it is. We are changing the foundation of a dysfunctional city for too many decades. Anyone that thinks that is an easy job to do, they should not run for mayor. I ran for mayor understanding the challenges in front of me and we're making those impacts.

Things from dyslexia screening of all of our children. 30 to 40 percent of our prisoners are dyslexic. The mere fact I'm doing dyslexia screenings, I'm going after the downstream crisis that we are facing. We're ready for this job and we're making history in doing so.

Five first women deputy mayors in my administration, a woman that's a police commissioner, a woman that's a fire commissioner, a woman in the Department of Sanitation. We are changing the mindset of running a city this complex.

**Wallace:** But New Yorkers say — and I'm not in any way minimizing those accomplishments you just pointed out — but New Yorkers say the biggest problem is crime. Back in March, here you were promising to make the city safer, especially on the subways. Take a look.

(Audio plays.)

**Mayor Adams:** The system has turned into a place, come in the subway system and do whatever you want. And so people are pushing back on me, "Oh, there goes that mean popo police officer Eric again." That is so... Call me what you want. You're going to be safe. I'm like broccoli. You're going to hate me now, but you're going to love me later.

(Audio ends.)

**Mayor Adams:** I love that quote.

**Wallace:** That's your quote. I'm glad you liked your own work. But former Democratic Governor David Patterson said the other day that things are worse than ever. Check him out.

(Audio plays.)

**David Paterson, Former Governor of New York:** For the first time in... Even in the late eighties and nineties when the crime rate was killing 2,000 people a year, I never felt as unsafe as I do now just walking around. And God forbid, sometimes we take the subway home from WABC and you're hearing about an assault on the subway almost every other day.

(Audio ends.)

**Mayor Adams:** Think about that for a moment, because that's such a powerful quote that he made. He said, even during the time when we were having 2,000 homicides a year. I policed during those times. We're not having 2,000 homicides a year. The difference from then and now... We have an average of less than six crimes a day on the subway system with 3.5 million riders. But if you write your story based on the narrative that you're going to look at the worst of those six crimes and put it on the front pages of your paper every day, people are going to start to feel what David Patterson just stated. So I have to deal with those six felony crimes a day and the perception of fear.

Yes, we decreased gun violence in the city, which I've zeroed in on, decreased homicides. We've removed off our streets over 5,700 guns. 27 year high in gun arrests. We are attacking the problem exactly the way I stated. And now we have to deal with that real perception. We are going to put our police officers doing patrol again, giving them a route back in our Police Department.

**Wallace:** You're saying that the crime problem in this city is more perception than reality?

**Mayor Adams:** No, it's a combination of both. New Yorkers must be safe. They're not safe enough for me. Even if it is less than six crimes a day, that is too many for me and I'm clear on that.

**Wallace:** But mayor, the New York City crime statistics are that, year-to-date, crime in the subways is up 41 percent over the same period last year. And serious crime, major felonies, are up even more than that. That's not perception, that's reality.

**Mayor Adams:** Well, let's be clear about this also. You do an analysis of the six major cities in America...

**Wallace:** Wait, wait. Those statistics are New York City's Police Department's statistics.

**Mayor Adams:** Right. As I stated, if you do an analysis of the six major cities in America, the crime waves is tackling all of our cities. New York City is the safest out of the six major cities in America. I also showed how I have turned around the morale of the Police Department. 27 year high in removing guns off our streets, the over-proliferation of guns. So yes, we have a real crime problem that we are addressing, but part of that is the perception that every day those six crimes are being highlighted over and over again.

**Wallace:** You keep saying six crimes. I think it's 1,800 transit crimes in the year-to-date versus 1,200 a year ago. That's almost a 50 percent increase. That's not six a day and you don't get to 1,800 by now with six a day.

**Mayor Adams:** Well, when you're looking at crimes, you're putting in place felony and misdemeanors. The felonies...

**Wallace:** The felonies are up even more than misdemeanors. Let me just, if I may, respectfully. Earlier this month, there were three stabbings on New York City subways in eight hours. A 38-year-old man stabbed and killed in the Bronx, a 45-year-old man stabbed in the face in Brooklyn, a 59-year-old man stabbed in Harlem. True, you've set up an anti-gun unit. You've cracked down on homeless people. But facts are facts. 41 percent is 41 percent.

**Mayor Adams:** Yeah. And you're saying facts are facts and that's why it's important for us to lean into those facts of how as we increase the amount of riders back on our service system, we have to deal with those average of less than six crimes a day. And I want to be clear on that. I don't want to walk away from anyone believing that we are zeroed in. That's why we have over 750,000 subway inspection safety inspections. 19,000 people we have rejected from our system because they were disorderly. 75,000 summonses of a thousand new officers in the system. We identified that we have to ensure our system is safe and the police officers are doing that every day while we tackle the mental health crises. Many of those crimes that you talked about with the stabbings that you just communicated came from those with real mental health crises that have been ignored for years in our subway system and we have gone in and addressed them head on.

**Wallace:** Let's talk a little bit about Eric Adams. You grew up in Queens. This is well known. You joined a gang as a young man. You were arrested for criminal trespassing. And you say that when you went to the police station, the police beat you. Why on earth would all of that lead you to become a policeman?

**Mayor Adams:** Because I saw the duality of public safety. Yes, there was a number of police officers who were abusive, but that was not what I saw every day as well. I saw men and women who understood the nobility of running towards danger when others would have moved in another direction. And I knew that if we had the balance of justice and public safety, that is a prerequisite to our prosperity. I believed it then, and I believe it now and I'm seeing it every day with the men and women who I served in.

**Wallace:** You served on the force for 22 years. What did you learn about New York City from that experience?

**Mayor Adams:** Oh. It's a quote that I say all the time from Archbishop Desmond Tutu, "We spend a lifetime pulling people out of the river. No one goes upstream and prevent them from falling in the first place." How do we have the system where we not identifying dyslexia when we know 30 to 40 percent of the children that are in our prison system here in New York are dyslexic? 80 percent of our prisoners don't have a high school diploma, equivalency diploma. That's a downstream mindset and we want to take our city upstream. And that's a challenge, but we are really focused on doing so. And I learned that because when I saw a young person arrested, I realized that we already failed because of that arrest. We didn't do what we were supposed to do on the street.

**Wallace:** The other day you addressed the latest graduating class of police men and women, both in the police force and the transit police. And you said something very interesting. You said that back in the day that everybody was on the cop's side, but now they're not. What do you mean?

**Mayor Adams:** No, they're not. During the mid-eighties and early nineties when I policed in the city, all of us identified it was the good guys trying to fight the bad guys, and there was a clear line between that. You tell me, when was the last bill we passed that helped people who were innocent victims of a crime? Every piece of legislation you see going across our lawmakers' desk, those pieces are protecting those who commit crimes. Our media was on our side. Our prosecutors were on our side. Our judges were on our side. Our lawmakers were on our side. Now it feels as though police are on alone in this fight to stop the over proliferation of guns, the revolving doors system of catch, release, repeat. Many of the offenders are repeated offenders. It's time for us to refocus our attention, not only as New Yorkers, but as Americans when the decent innocent people who are the victims of crimes, not those who are committing crimes.

**Wallace:** I want to ask you about another aspect of policing because for a while there was this support for something called broken windows theory. And the idea was if you enforce small crimes, if you let people know that the police are out there and the law is the law, that that will trickle down and it'll break down crime. And then there was a feeling, well it unnecessarily incarcerates people who shouldn't be. You seem to have gone back to that. You call (inaudible) a different quality of life, but for instance, people who jump the turnstile in subways, you say, that's illegal and we're going to enforce it.

**Mayor Adams:** People often state when you look at quality of life issues that you're criminalizing the poor. That is not what you're doing. And it's an indictment on anyone who believes because someone is poor, they will commit a crime. I know what it is to be poor, growing up poor. What we are saying, you cannot create an environment where people are walking into stores stealing what they want and walking out without paying for them. That's organized crime is part of what's happening. You can't create an environment where people jump the turnstile in our subway system. Many people go on the system and do that and commit a crime. We learned that from the mid-nineties. We've caught so many people carrying guns on the system. You can't have a system where people are riding through your streets with paper plates, stolen vehicles. We need to zero in a precision way on that type of policing, not to be abusive, not to throw out a wide net that I fought against as a police officer, but to be strategic, this precision policing to solve those quality of life issues that lead to being crimes.

**Wallace:** Let me ask you about another issue, much less serious, but another one you've had to deal with. And that is that you like to go out at night and you even have picked up the nickname the nightlife mayor. And for folks who don't know around the country, you've had to deal with this, for instance, this summer.

**Mayor Adams:** I tell you what (inaudible) going to do full page stories on them. Nobody's not want to hang out with me anymore. Y'all write these stories about me that are just, you have to look at them and laugh. I have an active, lovely life, right? (Laughter.)

**Wallace:** You have an active, lovely life.

**Mayor Adams:** New York City — think about this for a moment — it's a 24 hour city. When I go out, I am patronizing my restaurants, my hotels, my dishwashers, my cooks. Then what I do next, I go into the subway system to see if my midnight people are working. I go into my hospitals. I go visit this 24 hour city. This is not a nine to five city. And this is a city that never sleeps, so the mayor should not be taking a nap. He should be out interacting with all the people of the city. And I love that. And it's a multibillion dollar industry, our nightlife industry. And they tell me all the time, "Thank you mayor for acknowledging us."

**Wallace:** But you know that you take hits for that. I mean you had to respond to it there. When you got a migrant emergency where the city is facing, like the rest of the country, and economic downturn, when you've got a crime issue, any thought at all about toning down your after hours? I mean you say it's not after hours because you're on the clock 24 hours a day. Any thought of toning it down?

**Mayor Adams:** Well, think about what you just said. You said we have an economic issue. My nightlife is a multibillion dollar industry. People are afraid to go back out to restaurants. Now they see their mayor going out saying, "Come back out to our city." That is what the whole theme is. So you say, "Okay, Eric, you're taking hits." What is being a mayor of New York without taking hits? You can't. You can't wake up and read the papers in the day and say, "Oh my God, I'm afraid of being criticized." I have 8.8 million people in the city. I have 35 million opinions. That is the city we call New York.

**Wallace:** A few months ago on TV you said that, and you've referred to dyslexia a couple of times here, if you're learning disability had been diagnosed earlier, we would now be calling you Mr. President instead of Mr. Mayor. You seemed to be joking. First of all, were you joking?

**Mayor Adams:** Yes I was.

**Wallace:** Okay. Would you like to be president?

**Mayor Adams:** I'd like to be the mayor of New York City. You know you can run the country from New York. The way goes New York goes America. And I enjoy being the mayor, solving problems on the ground, duplicating those solutions, helping my colleagues across the country. As I learn from them, they learn from me. I enjoy being the mayor of the city. This is something I wanted to be for 28 years to resolve those on the ground problems and serve the city. That's why I'm happy doing this job.



**Wallace:** Respectfully, that is the most politician answer you've given me so far. Would you like to be president?

**Mayor Adams:** No. I like being the mayor of the City of New York, one of the most important cities on the globe.

**Wallace:** No — are you ruling it out? You're saying, "I will never run for higher office"?

**Mayor Adams:** Who would answer that? I would never run for higher office. I don't know what's in the cards. I have a job to do right now and the worst thing could happen is that I have to sit in front of you again one day and (inaudible) that. I'm always going to do the job I am in right now. And that's the mayor of this great city, New York.

**Wallace:** You're bidding on behalf of the city for New York to be the host of the 2024 Democratic National Convention. Should Joe Biden run again for president or should he step aside for a new, younger generation?

**Mayor Adams:** Yes, he should.

**Wallace:** Yes, he should what?

**Mayor Adams:** Yes, he should run again. He has been amazing. He navigated us out of Covid. It was a total mess, what we inherited. What he's doing around student loan forgiveness. What he has done around really highlighted the over proliferation of guns in our country. I think he should run again and we're hoping the convention will come here to New York City. We think that the diversity of this city speaks volume of the Democratic Party and we are hoping that it comes here and I'm excited about that he's planning on running again.

**Wallace:** You talked a little bit earlier about some issues where you think that the country and even Democrats have gone too far in protecting the criminal at the expense of the victim. One example is New York state's ban on cash bail for a lot of serious crimes. Some people say that you sound, on some issues, more like a Republican than a Democrat. Do you believe that your party has in some areas gone too far left and become too woke?

**Mayor Adams:** No, just to the contrary. I believe that the rank-and-file Democrat, we are radically tactical and the problem is that we try to highlight those who are on the extreme of both parties. The far extreme, I believe they have hijacked this country. They want us to believe that we want an over-proliferation of guns in one far right and the far left position that whomever is caught with a gun should not be arrested. So the violence we are seeing in our country and the over proliferation of guns, the co-conspirators are the far left and the far right. The everyday Americans in the middle, we are being impacted by that. And so I think it's an unfair comment that people believe that the rank-and-file overwhelming Democrats believe that we need to ensure that we create an environment that we can raise healthy children and families.

**Wallace:** To the degree that the far left of this Democratic Party captures the headlines and people talk about defunding the police or ending ICE or other things. If Democrats take a (inaudible) in the midterm elections, does your party need a course correction?

**Mayor Adams:** We already have the right course, the right correction. I think that it is truly unfortunate that those radically practical Democrats like me, their voices are not allowed to be heard. Their voices are not pierced through the volume of politics right now. And we'd rather hear from those on the extremes. I say, when I move around New York City, in America, they're more in line with the philosophies and beliefs of how do we have a country that is going to take care of everyday working people and ensure that we are protecting New Yorkers?

**Wallace:** Mayor Adams...

**Mayor Adams:** Yes.

**Wallace:** ... Thank you. It's been a pleasure.

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