

Transcript: Mayor Eric Adams Holds In-Person Q-and-A

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Video available at: <https://youtu.be/eUyd7EX9TME>

Mayor Eric Adams: Thanks so much. And as in yesterday, we wanted to bring together some of our faith-based leaders that are women to help us as we continue to craft out a humane way of dealing with many of the crises that we are facing in our city. And what I found are really insightful is how much, when I spoke with the women from the Muslim communities, and now today, with the rabbis from the Jewish community, the issues they raise were the same, the same issues. So it doesn't matter if you're in a synagogue or a church, a Buddhist temple, or a mosque. These women leaders are feeling the concerns of their constituency. And so in the spirit of tikkun olam, we are coming together to repair our world, and we have to do it by first starting with communicating.

Mayor Adams: It's okay to disagree, but you're not going to solve a problem by being disagreeable. And we have stated that we're going to continue this dialogue, learn from each other and support each other to accomplish the task that we believe is extremely important. People are hurting, and hurt people hurt people. They do hurtful things. And government must be used to partner with our faith-based leaders to resolve the issues that we are facing and I'm encouraged to do so. And I'm extremely encouraged by the leaders that came here today. I would now like to turn it over to Rabbi Rachel and Rabbi Sharon, to say a few words before I open to open press.

[...]

Mayor Adams: Very, very well said. Very well said, especially the complicated part. But Rabbi Rachel and I met when I was borough president. She, unlike many, didn't only talk about what we should do with our homeless, her synagogue allowed homeless men, during the non-use time of their space, to spend the night inside their space. And I spent the night with a group of homeless men one night, and it was just a moving

experience to hear firsthand the pathway to homelessness, what was needed, and the continuous evolution of how we need to get this right.

Mayor Adams: And so I really thank her for the day to allow me to stay with those men. I got more out of being with those men than what they would probably get from speaking with me. And it's just continued the process of educating on the ground. You cannot solve street level problems by living in an ivory tower. We have to get down to the granular level, and they're going to help me do that as well as other leaders that we are bringing together to hear, those who are on the ground facing these issues firsthand. That's the only way we are going to get this done. And so we're open if you have any questions to them, and then we'll do off topics.

Question: Jacob Henry, Jewish Telegraphic Agency. Can you just describe the differences between a progressive group and an Orthodox group that you've met with and maybe some of the similarities as well?

Mayor Adams: Yes.

Jacob Henry: Do we have Orthodox?

[...]

Question: Okay. So what have you learned from this group that is both Orthodox and progressive, and describe, maybe compare that to your time campaigning inside of neighborhoods in Williamsburg and in Laurel Park. Are there similarities? Are there differences?

Mayor Adams: Yes, there are. There are. And I think far too often, we lean into where we disagree, which believe it or not is the smallest amount of things, and we don't lean into where we agree. In all the communities that I have campaigned in, as well as in non-Orthodox communities, they want safe streets. They want to be able to have housing. They want to make sure that their children are educated. They're concerned about the environment as well. So the same concerns that I've heard from this group is a concern that I hear from those who are part of the Orthodox communities. There may be different ways in accomplishing that, but we all want to get to the same destination,

and I'm willing to figure out all of these complex ways of accomplishing the task of the fundamental things that we need.

[...]

Mayor Adams: Yes. Yes, you can.

[...]

Question: Yeah, of course. And I agree with you on that, but also in terms of the issues such as policing, Rikers Island, sometimes they lean more conservative in an Orthodox community, right? Was any of that discussed in this meeting? Were there any improvements or headway on these issues that we may not have gotten to yet or seen?

[...]

Question: Mr. Mayor, I just want to ask you in general about this meeting. You said that this is the beginning. Is that part of your coalition of building skills? Of trying to bring together communities that believe in the agenda [inaudible]? And did you leaders hear from the mayor things that satisfied you in terms of his policies?

Mayor Adams: Yeah. I think that number one, we have to come together as a coalition and it's not always easy to do. And I'm often criticized by my willingness to meet with everyone and talk. I think that is why we are in this mess that we are in. We wonder why children are displaying violence on our streets because they're watching adults display violence every day in how we interact with each other. We have to start communicating and talking again, and I'm going to do that. Sometimes, I will be criticized for meeting with gang members. I'll be criticized for meeting with those who are diametrically opposed to what I believe, criticized for just wanting to figure out how we can get this right. But I'm going to continue to do it. And this is the beginning, and so if you believe today, after we departed from this room, that we found a cure from COVID, no we did not. This is the starting point of sitting in a room together, and we are going to do many more like this to zero in on these complex issues.

[...]

Question: Could you just describe that night that you said you spent in the synagogue with the homeless men? And also, how often do these... Are they always welcome? What other services does the synagogue offer these people?

Mayor Adams: And that's a great question because there's this energy in this city where everyone is stating, "We need to do something about our homeless brothers and sisters. We need to make sure they're in housing, make sure they receive wraparound services, their rallies, their protests," and everyone states that. And then when we state, "You're right. We found the place in your neighborhood." They all of a sudden say, "Whoa. We said, we need to do it. Just don't do it on my block. Just don't do it in my councilmanic district. Just don't do it in my congressional district. Just don't do it in my community board." Our verbalization must reach the realization that it has to be built somewhere.

Mayor Adams: And what I saw in the synagogue, I walked away that morning with the full understanding that number one, the men are no different than who I am. They fell on hard times. They wanted to put their lives back on track. And they had the same desires that we all have. Number two, that was during a particular period of time when everyone was saying for the most part, we had the Dean Street Shelter, we had other shelters, and some communities stood up, and this synagogue was one of them, and stated we have to be about our faith. And to see that, it renewed my belief that in Windsor Terrace, in parts of Crown Heights, you had communities where people were saying, "These are our neighbors. We need to wrap around and give them the support they deserve," and that's what I walked away with from that synagogue visit, talking to those men, hearing their concerns, everything from the food they were being fed to the lack of services. It was extremely instructional to spend the night interacting with them.

Question: And when was this that you spent the night?

Mayor Adams: I don't know. It was-

[...]

Mayor Adams: Yes. It's 2018. Right now as mayor, my life is in dog years. Every day is a multitude of days. Reporter Brad?

[...]

Mayor Adams: It's not going to happen during my four years as mayor. But when people look back on this administration, they're going to come to a real conclusion that, "Darn. He was a good mayor."

Mayor Adams: Okay. Yep. We're going to spare you the off-topic. But thank you, so much.

[Crosstalk]

Question: [Inaudible] subways to school, doing things like that and then with homelessness?

Mayor Adams: Yeah. The gun detector is just a one week pilot that we are looking at. That's what pilots – pilots is about seeing what works, modifying, seeing how does it fit into our overall public safety plan. And this has been my history of using technology to keep New Yorkers safe. And so we are not at the place of stating that this is going to be used or not going to be used. We're still testing and kicking the tires of all of this new technology.

[Crosstalk]

Question: I wonder if you had seen these pictures of guns that were just found at [inaudible] yesterday, a 15 year old, if that increases your desire to have these kinds of pilot programs in schools because that's the kind of weapon that you could find, say if you had a pilot program. And there's been a huge increase finding those kinds of weapons. And think about it, a 15-year-old boy walks over to [inaudible] in his backpack.

Mayor Adams: And what you said is so important because it leans into what I've been saying. And both of these clips are loaded. These are loaded clips, and it looks like they probably have anywhere from 12 to 13 rounds. So this is potentially 26 rounds of a child carrying it in his backpack. All right? His backpack. So everyone laughed at Eric when he said, "Check the backpacks of your students." There was a lot of mockery around it, but this is what's happening.

Mayor Adams: I'm asking today for every parent in this city to sit down with their child and talk about gun violence. We need to get everyone engaged. This young man carrying these two nine millimeters with full clips in the school, in his nap sack. That should just send chills down every parent, every parent. And so this is when I talk about using new technology to detect guns. This is when I talk about those who are pushing back against having school safety agents in school. It's as though they're living in an alternate reality.

Question: Does it point to the fact that the new technology that you're looking at is a good thing and a necessary thing?

Mayor Adams: Yeah, yeah. By far, and the new technology is needed because of the over proliferation of guns, and the sophistication that people are using to bring guns in school. This school, to my understanding, did not have any form of detection device. Can you imagine what the danger this could have done to those innocent children who are just going there to learn? This is why I'm calling for new technology to detect guns.

Question: It's sort of on topic. Sounds like you discussed the [inaudible] Rikers. I know we've been focusing a lot on the current problem at the jail's complex, but are you still on board at this point with the plan to close the jail's complex by 2027? How are discussions about that progressing at this point given everything that's going on?

Mayor Adams: The law is the law. The city council passed the law on what we could do with Rikers and what we can't do with Rikers. There's City Council members who feel differently. That is something they have to talk with their colleagues, but I'm going to follow the law. The law is clear. I'm going to follow the law.

Question: I've got another question on Rikers, and I know that you've taken some questions on this, the receivership.

Mayor Adams: Yes.

Question: Receivership gives you more power, it gives the city more power in hiring and firing. You said you don't want the receivership. It also potentially gives you a political benefit that there's some shared responsibility here. There've been five deaths

since January with people in custody at Rikers. Why are you so resistant with the receivership? You'd have some [inaudible] if I'm not mistaken.

Mayor Adams: No, no. No, you don't. And nobody says – it says we can't do our job. That's what it says. What's next? Do we take over our school system? Do we take over the Department of Sanitation? Do we take over probation? What's next? We are responsible to take taxpayers' dollars and provide goods and services to the people of this city. And when you start stating that your city can't do its job, that's an indictment of the over 300,000 city employees and all those who are employed on Rikers, and I'm not surrendering this city to anyone to believe we can't do our job.

Mayor Adams: And let's be clear, I don't see federal penitentiaries running all smoothly. Go right to the federal penitentiary in Brooklyn and see the concerns that I have in there. Getting a receiver, putting Rikers in receivership is not this magic bullet of dysfunctional. But there's the special monitor, something that many people are not picking up, the special monitor has made it clear. The commissioner that I picked, he's basically stated, "This is the right guy. He's moving in the right direction. He has a full understanding of what's needed there." I don't know why no one is picking that up. We're five months in, we're reducing some of the problems, we brought back those who were out sick, we are retrieving the weapons that are in the facility. And so when you look at what we're doing, the special monitor who's there, he's saying, "This is the right guy." We need to write about that.

Question: Could you get some more in principle than just a practical matter? it kind of sounds that way, the messages.

Mayor Adams: Nope. Nope. No, it's not on principle. It's a combination. It's a combination that we have the right person. The commissioner is the right person, his history of turning around facilities. What he has done before, what he's doing right now. Every time I speak with him... He's the only person I know that gets up earlier than I do. He's already in the office. This guy is the right person for our city. And so all I say, give us a chance, give us a chance. Hold us accountable, but give us a chance to turn around a dysfunctional system that has been dysfunctional as long as I can remember.

[Crosstalk]

Question: I wonder if you support developer Bruce Teitelbaum who proposed a mixed use project in Harlem, especially now that the civil rights museum is no longer part of the plan.

Mayor Adams: Folks on the ground matter, they matter to me. It's all about hearing from the people on the ground. He doesn't have to convince me, he has to convince the people on the ground. He convinced the people on the ground. They come back to me and say they're comfortable with the plan, they feel as though it's going to add to that community. I'm willing to sit down and talk to him.

Question: What have you heard from people on the ground as far as-

Mayor Adams: I have not heard at all. I thought they were all still in deliberations to determine where they're going to be. I have not heard from people on the ground.

Question: How can you say crime is as high as it's ever been?

Mayor Adams: No. No. I didn't say crime is higher than it's ever been. And if you find that quote, show me, okay? Do you have that quote?

Question: Not on me.

Mayor Adams: No. No, you don't have it. Let's start with that. What I stated that I have never seen anything like this: the over availabilities of guns, the easy use of guns, and the comfort that people have in carrying guns. I've never witnessed anything like this, where people are just open to shoot. They're comfortable with carrying guns. As we just saw, a child carrying two nine millimeters, I've never witnessed this before. And we have to go after that level of comfortability that guns is something we could use.

Mayor Adams: I just learned yesterday from the mayor of Atlanta, the governor of Atlanta just removed all the rules for obtaining guns. They've got ahead of the Supreme Court with their open carry. You no longer have to go through any rules. If that law passes in the Supreme Court and everyone can carry at will, like what they're doing to Atlanta, we have a problem.