

Eric Adams: 'When we took prayers out of schools, guns came into schools'

By JULIA MARSH

At an interfaith breakfast Tuesday, Mayor Eric Adams seemed to regret the landmark U.S. Supreme Court ruling that banned school-sponsored prayer in 1962.

“When we took prayers out of schools, guns came into schools,” Adams said to applause from hundreds of religious leaders gathered at an annual event in Manhattan.

Adams was discussing the role that people who attend synagogues, churches, Sikh temples and mosques could play in reducing societal ills from homelessness to domestic violence.

“Don’t tell me about no separation of church and state. State is the body, church is the heart. You take the heart out of the body, the body dies,” Adams said.

A mayoral spokesperson said after the event Adams “personally believes all of our faiths would ensure we are humane to one another.” The spokesperson accused reporters asking whether Adams did not support the separation of church and state of attempting to “hijack the narrative in an effort to misrepresent the mayor’s comments.”

Adams made the remarks immediately following [his chief advisor](#), Ingrid Lewis-Martin, who is a Christian chaplain.

“We know in government, many times, it is said that one has to separate church from state, but we have an administration that doesn’t believe in that,” Lewis-Martin said. “We have a mayor, who you will hear from shortly, who is definitely one of the chosen.”

The New York Civil Liberties Union blasted the speeches. “We are a nation and a city of many faiths and no faith,” said NYCLU’s Donna Lieberman. “In order for our government to truly represent us, it must not favor any belief over another, including non-belief,” she said.

The mayor has drawn [key political support](#) from Black congregations across the city, who are reliable voters.

Adams identifies as a Christian. He was raised in the Church of God in Christ, but now mostly attends non denominational services, according to his spokesperson. He also collects Buddhist statues and [believes “a special energy”](#) comes from New York since it sits on a store of rare gems and stones.

Later in his remarks, Adams deployed a yellow kitchen sponge and told the audience to embrace their faith and squeeze out negativity.

“You will never be who you ought to be if you carry around a saturated sponge of despair. You got to wring it out,” he said.

IT’S TUESDAY: Stay with us each afternoon — especially on snowy days like today — as we keep you updated on the latest New York news in Albany, City Hall and beyond.

GUN VIOLENCE DROPS: Speaking of gun violence, Gov. Kathy Hochul on Wednesday said the 20 cities that are part of the state’s Gun Involved Violence Elimination initiative reported the fewest shootings involving injuries last month since the first half of 2020, and New York City had the fewest since May 2020.

Hochul attended Northwell Health’s Fourth Annual Gun Violence Prevention Forum in Manhattan: “We are taking major steps in the right direction, but these numbers are still too high. Each and every incident is tragic, and each shooting represents an unquantifiable amount of pain and harm to victims and their communities.”

Hochul added that federal data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention showed that New York had the lowest firearm homicide rate of the 10 largest states in the country in 2021.

Crime issues [were front and center](#) in Hochul’s narrow election win last year so she’s looking at a series of criminal justice measures this year, including another round of changes to the controversial bail laws. – *Joseph Spector*

HELP FOR FARMERS: Senate Democrats on Tuesday were set to pass a package of legislation aimed at helping farmers and food providers.

The measures come just days after the Hochul administration [angered many farmers](#) by giving final approval to lowering the overtime threshold for farmworkers down to 40 hours a week by 2032.

The Senate bills, if also approved in the Assembly and signed by Hochul, would establish the Office of Urban Agriculture, expand the definition of land use in agricultural production and establish a farming hotline to help connect farmers to state resources. It would also create procurement goals so more state-made products are purchased by state agencies, expand regional farmers’ markets and establish a carbon farming tax credit.

“I’m proud to help champion this robust legislative package, which will greatly expand access to healthy, locally-sourced food for all New Yorkers,” said Senate Agriculture Committee chair Michelle Hinchey (D-Ulster). – *Joseph Spector*

FDNY LAWSUIT: Four FDNY chiefs are suing the department over Commissioner Laura

Kavanaugh's decision to reassign and demote them and others, alleging her "ill-conceived" actions have created a "grave risk" for the city and its firefighters.

The lawsuit accuses Kavanaugh of "abus[ing] the office of Fire Commissioner and is seeking the immediate reinstatement of eleven staff chiefs. "Respondent Kavanaugh's brief tenure as FDNY Commissioner has shown what happens when a political operative is put in charge of a public-safety agency as vital as the FDNY," the lawsuit states.

A city law department spokesperson said they are reviewing the case. — *Janaki Chadha*

EARLY INTERVENTION AUDIT: An audit from state Comptroller Tom DiNapoli released Tuesday found troubles with therapeutic and support services available through New York's Early Intervention Program for infants and toddlers with disabilities.

The [audit](#) contended young children did not receive services or faced delays in care, recommending the state Department of Health improve its management of the EI program.

"Failure to provide babies and toddlers with early intervention services misses a critical window of opportunity and increases the risk of significant developmental and learning delays," DiNapoli said in a statement.

DOH pointed to the absence of parental consent as the cause of many instances of denied or delayed services. — *Joseph Spector*

SUNY APPOINTMENT — State University of New York Chancellor John King announced the appointment of Dina Refki and Guillermo Martinez as executive director and deputy director of the Institute on Immigrant Integration Research and Policy. — *Katelyn Cordero*

OFFICE CONVERSIONS: City Council members called Tuesday for more low-income homes from a tax incentive proposal in Albany to spur affordable housing production within office-to-residential conversions.

Hochul's budget laid out a tax incentive program that would require at least 20 percent of new apartments in a converted office building to be income-restricted for low- and middle-income households. The income-restricted apartments could go to households making as much as 100 percent of the area median income, or \$120,100 for a family of three, but the program would require at least 5 percent be affordable at 40 percent of the area median income.

"My community, as folks may well know, has a median [area median income] that is below 30 percent. I need to see my community in these proposals," said Council Member Pierina Sanchez, chair of the housing committee. "Every single time that there is a major citywide proposal that leaves my community out, I'm starting on the offensive...I hope that the administration will join in pushing the state to change these considerations."

Council Member Rafael Salamanca, chair of the land use committee, agreed: “What you’re doing is those families of color that we represent will not be able to qualify for these units because you’re not going deeper in affordability.” Brendan McLaughlin, Deputy Commissioner for Policy and Strategy at the housing department responded, “We believe that this is a good mix of affordability for the benefit that’s being given.” — *Janaki Chadha*

BUSINESSES FOR MINIMUM WAGE: A new coalition of hundreds of businesses and business organizations on Tuesday said it would push for raising the minimum wage and indexing further increases to inflation.

The group [New York Business for a Fair Minimum Wage](#) said of supporting a bill in the Legislature, called the [Raise the Wage Act](#): “When people earn more as workers, they can afford to spend more as customers. Minimum wage increases go right back into the economy as spending at local businesses.” — *Joseph Spector*

SUOZZI’S NEXT GIG: Global consulting firm Actum announced Tuesday former Rep. Tom Suozzi is joining the company as a co-chair — a move that raises questions about whether the erstwhile lawmaker would take on Rep. George Santos (R-N.Y.) in 2024. Suozzi, who is barred from lobbying the Senate and the House for two years, will provide strategic advice to the firm’s leadership and clients, according to the announcement.

Suozzi held the Long Island seat prior to Santos, but [announced a run](#) for governor in 2021 instead of seeking reelection. His quest did not end well. He finished [with 13 percent](#) in the Democratic primary, far behind Hochul and trailed New York City Public Advocate Jumaane Williams. Suozzi’s name is often bandied about in political circles as a viable opponent to a severely vulnerable Santos — whose [poor showing](#) in polls is surpassed only by [the scorn](#) of the Nassau County Republican Party. But for now he has made no mention of wanting to mount a comeback. “In the meantime,” one Long Island Democratic consultant said, “Tom is just living his life.”

Should [one of the investigations](#) into Santos produce results serious enough to boot him from office, Suozzi could face a potentially serious obstacle to entering the race: Becoming the Democratic candidate in a special election would require the blessing of Hochul. — *Joe Anuta*

— **A Queen voters lawsuit calling for a “fair and effective representation”** is not stopping NYC Council candidates from starting the petitioning process for the upcoming elections. ([WNYC](#))

— **Here you can monitor from a live updated map** how much snow you can expect in upstate New York. ([Times Union](#))

— **Why have 23 whales been spotted dead** on the East Coast in just three months? ([The New York Times](#))

— Mayor Eric Adams’ proposed **boost to the minimum wage for city employees to \$18 would harm** emergency medical technicians and paramedics, advocates argue. ([THE CITY](#))

— **Petitioning begins today** for New York City Council races after a judge declined to grant a restraining order. ([amNewYork](#))

Correction: New York Business for a Fair Minimum Wage is supporting a bill in the Legislature to increase the minimum wage. An earlier version didn’t accurately state the group’s position.

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