

Local Author Shares Lessons on Homeland Security

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Central Ohio native Matt Mayer said he learned a lot about protecting American citizens during his stint as a political appointee to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Now, the 39-year-old Dublin resident is hoping to pass that knowledge along through his new book, "Homeland Security and Federalism: Protecting America from Outside the Beltway," which was released by Praeger on June 30.

The greatest lessons Mayer said he hopes to impart are the importance of state and local law enforcement in maintaining the nation's security against foreign and domestic threats and what he sees as the pitfalls of a centralized government.

"What I want people to walk away with is to understand that historically and constitutionally, power is supposed to be held closer to the people and it's never closest to the people when it is in Washington, D.C.," said Mayer, who grew up in Westerville and graduated from St. Francis DeSales High School.

"Really, the book is a book about federalism and getting power out of Washington. I just use homeland security to make a case for that argument."

Mayer spent nine months researching and writing the book. Much of it is based on his experiences during the approximately two-and-a-half years he worked with then-homeland security chiefs Tom Ridge and Michael Chertoff under President George W. Bush. The book includes a forward by Edwin Meese III, who served as U.S. attorney general under President Ronald Reagan.

One of the biggest challenges in writing the book, Mayer said, was finding a way to balance the work with the personal relationships he built while in Washington. "I am a conservative, so I don't want to criticize the president I worked for and people who were my colleagues," he said. "It was really hard to think it all through so I didn't end up burning relationships and friendships but was still really honest with readers on what was not working."

Mayer said he tried to strike that balance by laying out the facts, some of which he says have never been reported, and supporting them with documentation from the public record.

"I'll find out (if I did that) from the reaction I get from the people who are part of the book," he said. "They don't have to be happy about being in the book, but I want them to agree that I was at least fair about them being in the book."

Mayer has an undergraduate degree from the University of Dayton and a law degree from Ohio State University. While he runs his own consulting business, Mayer said most of his time is spent as a visiting fellow at the conservative public policy think tank the Heritage Foundation, where he writes on national security issues. He also is an adjunct professor at Ohio State, where he teaches an undergraduate course comparing and contrasting U.S. and European responses to terrorism.

One of the things Mayer said he likes best about the book is it lays out case studies that demonstrate state or local government and law enforcement successes, including some from the Ohio Emergency Management Agency and the city of Columbus.

"It really gets into not just showing the theory of federalism but how, in practice, state and local governments are always more flexible than the federal government," Mayer said. "We've seen that with welfare reform and education reform and we are beginning to see that with health care reform. If we just get Washington out of the way, we see a lot more innovation out of the states."

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