

NEVADA TRAILBLAZERS

Meet William Horne:

Would-Be Pilot Flies High as Attorney and Politician

BY MARY BACON, ESQ.

For as far back as William Horne can remember, his world revolved around planes. There were no ifs, ands, or buts about it—he was going to be a fighter pilot in the U.S. Air Force. Horne participated in Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts, Civil Air Patrol, and Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) to prepare himself to become a pilot. As a boy, he was so in love with planes that one night, while riding his bike, he rode onto an Air Force base's tarmac, zooming right past military security to see the planes take off and land. Once military police noticed, they gave him a ride home—with a strongly worded discussion about safety and base protocol.

Then, one day while skiing, he fell deathly ill and went to an emergency room. Testing confirmed he had sickle cell traits. Unfortunately, that meant the altitude he would reach in a plane could trigger a crisis, like the one he experienced while he was skiing. The Air Force and the U.S. Navy would not let Horne fly. And while the U.S. Army said he could fly helicopters; they did not give him that opportunity



after he completed Officer's Advanced Camp. For the first time, Horne's path was not clear. He went back to the drawing board and sampled a variety of jobs while he was pursuing a bachelor's degree in criminal justice. He worked as a bouncer, a fitness instructor, a flight attendant, and a comedian. Then after a professor commented that he would enjoy law school, the stars seemed to align, and his future started to make sense to him again.

Horne was born in Wichita Falls, Texas. His parents met in Japan while his father was stationed there. After a tour in Panama, his family was stationed at Nellis Air Force Base when Horne was 7 years old. He went from living off base in Panama, enjoying the tropical climate and culture, to Louis Craig Elementary School in Las Vegas, where he was paddled for speaking in Spanish. After a short three years in Vegas, his family was restationed to Shepard Air Force Base in Wichita Falls, Texas. It felt like they stayed just long enough for his parents to announce a divorce.

Horne moved back to Nevada with his mother and sisters, and he went to Madison Sixth Grade Center in the historic Westside neighborhood of Las Vegas. That year, his father passed away from leukemia. Consumed with grief, Horne started acting out. "I was up to no good. There was fighting, bullying, and even a break in," he said. Luckily, his sixth-grade teacher, Mrs. Valdez, went out of her way to intervene. She refused to give up on him—and wouldn't let him give up on himself. Her presence changed his trajectory and set him back on the straightened path.

Fights and bullying came to an end, and he reprioritized himself to focus on school and music. Horne loved everything from R&B, rock, and rap, to country, playing everything from the accordion to the guitar, saxophone, tuba, piano, and drums.

Horne started law school at 37 as a non-traditional student. He acted as a class representative, took summer classes, and graduated early.

“I was really getting noticed during and after law school,” Horne commented. The Assembly Speaker of the Nevada Legislature at the time, Richard Perkins, asked him if he would run for the assembly. Horne’s answer was a quick no.

“I had volunteered, but never saw myself as a candidate,” he said. Then, at a function, Perkins asked again—and Horne’s then-girlfriend, soon-to-be wife, Brenda Weksler, advised him to consider the idea further.

Upon reconsideration, Horne decided to run for the Nevada Assembly.

“I’ve always enjoyed service,” he said. “And the position I was asked to consider was an assembly seat in the district where I grew up.”

He won the seat by about 220 votes.

During his first term, he was named Outstanding Freshman Assemblyman. The next session, he was named one of the five most effective legislators in the assembly. Within 12 years of taking office, he became Majority Leader.

Most memorably, Horne was the chair of the Committee on Higher Education Funding. In that role, he worked on the reformulation of funds allocated to higher education institutions. As a result, UNLV and other southern Nevada schools received a fairer proportion of funding earmarked for higher education. He also spearheaded and passed a bill that made Nevada the first state in the country to allow online gaming. He also passed Assembly Bill 219, which mandates that 75 percent of the revenue from lost or expired casino vouchers be sent to the state’s general fund and 25 percent stay with the casinos—a bill that’s produced approximately \$6 million in state funding every two years.

Reflecting on their friendship, a former colleague from the Legislature, Jason Frierson, said, “We went to law school together. I watched him fearlessly go after what he was trying to accomplish and tried to model myself after him as far as workload and work ethic. When I was going through a growth period on my way to become [Speaker of the Assembly], William Horne was a mentor to me. He’s a consummate public servant for this community. He cares about the issues and has stuck around and continued to give back. His work is a reflection of his character and values, and his commitment to the community he lives in.”

Since retiring from office, Horne has continued to stay involved in politics through lobbying. He is the co-founder and president of Western Public Affairs, a lobbying firm.

“I love my work. My favorite client, and favorite non-profit, is Safe Nest,” he said. “There was domestic violence in my household, and Safe Nest has always been really important to [me] because it is the largest provider of services for survivors of sexual and domestic violence and even provides batterers treatment. They approach the problem from all angles, including trying to break the cycle. I had domestic violence bills in the legislature, including one that made strangling your partner a felony. [Safe Nest’s] work is just so important to me.”

Most people are surprised to learn that in his spare time, Horne loves to cook and can bake from scratch. As a child, his



Horne and two of his children.



During his legislative career, William Horne had the opportunity to meet with the late U.S. Rep. John Lewis (D-Georgia).



William Horne and two of his children had the opportunity to meet former President Barack Obama after one of Obama’s rallies in Las Vegas.



William Horne poses with his mother.



Despite a busy schedule, William Horne still finds time to work out.

mother would partially prepare dinner, and he would finish it once he got home from school. He fell in love with cooking—particularly barbequing—and has loved it ever since.

“We would go camping in Boy Scouts, and the troop leaders would bring hamburgers and hot dogs to cook for dinner,” Horne said with a smile. “I was the kid that would bring pork loin and spices in Ziplock bags and supplies to bake a pineapple upside down cake in a Dutch oven.”