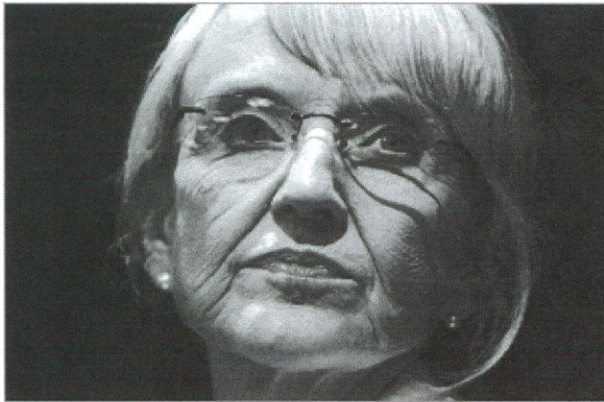


## 2010 Person of the Year: Gov. Jan Brewer

by Jeremy Duda

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Gov. Jan Brewer started out the year with very few political allies, but the momentum shifted after she signed SB1070 and convinced voters to pass her temporary 1-cent sales tax increase. Now, after standoffs with the federal government over health care and immigration, Brewer carries the most clout of any other Republican heading into the 2011 legislative session. (File Photo)

She may have inherited the state and all its problems in 2009, but in 2010, make no mistake about it — this was Jan Brewer's Arizona.

Brewer's first year was disastrous. She fought with her own party, sued Republican legislative leaders and failed to advance her top agenda item, even after a drawn-out series of special sessions. But in year two, the longtime politico put her personal stamp on the state.

When she signed SB1070, Arizona's far-reaching illegal immigration law, Brewer became the face of a state that hadn't received so much — or such critical — national attention in 20 years.

When she finally got her proposed sales tax ballot initiative through the Legislature after a year of battling her own party, she

showed the state that she not only had the will to stand her ground in the face of relentless opposition, but the ability to overcome it.

The result was a political turnaround of historic proportions.

A reasonable argument could be made that Sen. Russell Pearce should be the Arizona Capitol Times' Person of the Year for spearheading SB1070. But while Pearce commands attention when he talks about illegal immigration, people now listen to Brewer when she talks about anything.

As 2010 began, though, Brewer was desperately in need of allies. Most observers expected her 28-year political career to end in the Republican primary because of her advocacy for a sales tax increase. But by the time she had locked up the GOP nomination, Republican candidates were clamoring for her endorsement. When she toured the state with U.S. Sen. John McCain, many insiders wondered whether McCain, the kingmaker himself, had grasped onto the governor's long coattails.

Through it all, Brewer has been a study in contradiction. A lifelong conservative who began her term as governor with a call for higher taxes. A defender of education funding who proudly boasts of the multibillion-dollar cuts she's made to the budget, including to K-12 and universities. A governor who pushed a tax hike to protect Arizona's "most vulnerable" while trying to cut more than 310,000 people from the Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System. A warrior against the federal government who eagerly dished out millions in federal stimulus dollars and sent out waves of press releases to publicize it.

Brewer makes no apologies — for SB1070, for the tax hike, for the transplant cuts, or for anything else. She blames the federal government and her Democratic predecessor, former Gov. Janet Napolitano, for many of the problems she faces, and refuses to budge once she takes a stand.

Many, including Brewer's rivals for the Republican nomination, accused her of simply riding the wave of popular sentiment that followed SB1070. Others, especially Pearce, the bill's sponsor, did all the heavy lifting. She had little involvement with the bill until it landed on her



desk, and she became a GOP rock star by doing nothing more than signing it and then defending it.

Circumstance and fortune were certainly good to Brewer in 2010. Events beyond Brewer's control may have dragged her down in 2009, but when SB1070 burst onto the scene in April, she rode the wave to victory.

Fortune struck elsewhere as well. The nationwide Republican victory wave of 2010 would've lifted any incumbent Republican governor, but Brewer also benefited from a Democratic Party hobbled by an unpopular stance on SB1070 and a Democratic nominee, Attorney General Terry Goddard, who ran a lifeless and directionless campaign that earned him the scorn and anger of many in his own party.

At the end of 2009, Arizona voters barely knew who Brewer was, and among those who knew, opinions were low, said pollster Bruce Merrill. But after draping herself with SB1070, which led to a highly publicized White House meeting with President Barack Obama, Brewer revamped her image.

"She became a leader, somebody who was standing up for Arizona," Merrill said. "How much of that was good luck and how much of that was carefully planned strategy, I don't know."

Democratic consultant Mario Diaz said Brewer's meeting with Obama was the defining moment of the election. A year ago, Democrats thought Goddard was in pole position to win the Ninth Floor, he said, but Brewer ran a strong campaign and got lucky with SB1070. The photo of Brewer sitting across from Obama was the last nail in the Democrats' electoral coffin.

"That was a slap across the Democrats' face, quite frankly. That picture, to me, solidified the election," Diaz said. "That is when Jan Brewer became a leader, a true leader for the state of Arizona."

Brewer and her advisers bristle at the notion that she owes her election to Pearce and SB1070. While the credit for SB1070 lies foremost with Pearce, Proposition 100 was Brewer's victory. Nearly every member of her own party fought her on the temporary one-cent sales tax increase, and when lawmakers finally relented and put it on the ballot, she helped propel it to a blowout victory.

At the May 18 victory party for Prop. 100, the sense of relief that surrounded Brewer was palpable. She wrapped up her top policy initiative, earning her first voter mandate as governor. And by painting the tax hike as necessary to protect education funding, she took a core issue from the Democrats, who equivocated on the issue from day one.

If Pearce certainly was the driving force behind SB1070, Brewer was the spokeswoman defending it to the rest of the country. Obama and the Department of Justice's decision to sue Arizona over SB1070 made her an icon to states'-rights advocates, an image she promoted after joining a multi-state lawsuit against Obama's landmark health care bill.

Brewer also owns a few things she probably would rather sweep under the rug. As she prepares for her one and only full term as governor, she has been bombarded with criticism for her decision to eliminate potentially life-saving transplants for Medicaid patients. The cuts belonged as much to the Legislature as they did to her, but the derogatory label "Brewercare" is the one used by Democrats and liberal pundits across the country as they rail against the cuts.

Critics argue that Brewer's decision to sign SB1070, and her role as its advocate-in-chief in the national media, dealt a public relations blow to a state long accustomed to embarrassing headlines in other states. Though it's been overwhelmingly popular and spurred copycats in legislatures across the country, SB1070 drove away tourism and conventions, and even sparked the cancellation of the Border Governors Conference, an annual meeting of U.S. and Mexican governors that was set to take place in Arizona. Throngs of protesters descended on the Capitol, decrying what they viewed as a racist law and vilified Brewer as "Hitler's daughter."

If SB1070 hurt the state's national image, Brewer piled it on with several embarrassing moments during the campaign. She became a late-night talk show punch line after freezing for 13 seconds during her opening statement in a televised gubernatorial debate and for her mangling of the English language when she repeatedly said "we have did" in reference to the changes Arizona

has made under her leadership.

In promoting SB1070, Brewer repeatedly and falsely claimed that law enforcement had found the headless bodies of victims decapitated by drug cartels in the Arizona desert. She eventually backed down, but not before walking out on a room full of reporters who asked why she wouldn't refute her blatantly false claim. The headless-bodies fiasco followed Brewer's controversial assertion that most illegal immigrants were also drug mules, though she quickly backtracked on that claim.

The shine Brewer had when she gave her victory speech on Nov. 2 likely won't be as bright in 2011. The state still faces an estimated \$825 million deficit for the current fiscal year, and the red ink is expected to total \$1.4 billion in fiscal 2012, which begins July 1. Whatever solutions Brewer and the Legislature choose will almost certainly be unpopular.

With nearly 100 desperate transplant patients waiting in the wings, Democrats are likely to continue their offensive against Brewer and her AHCCCS cuts. Thus far, Brewer has not budged on their demands to pony up \$1.4 million for the program, a relative drop in the bucket.

And Pearce's next crusade, challenging the practice of birthright citizenship and the longstanding interpretation of the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, will force Brewer to make a difficult decision.

If Brewer once again joins the fight, she'll have a public relations dilemma on her hands that could overshadow the furor that followed SB1070. If she rejects Pearce's overtures — the business community that lent her its strong support will no doubt lobby furiously for her veto — the conservative hero worship that followed her signing of SB1070 will likely vanish.

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