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Unexpected Governor Takes an Unwavering Course

By **RANDAL C. ARCHIBOLD**

PHOENIX — One night last week, Grant Woods, the former state attorney general, spent more than an hour on the telephone with [Gov. Jan Brewer](#), a fellow Republican who was considering whether to sign into law the nation's toughest [immigration](#) enforcement bill.

The governor listened patiently, Mr. Woods recalled, as he laid out his arguments against the bill: that it would give too much power to the local police to stop people merely suspected of being illegal immigrants and would lead to racial profiling; that some local police officers have been abusive toward immigrants; and that the law could lead to costly legal battles for the state.

When he hung up, Mr. Woods knew he had lost the case. "She really felt that the majority of Arizonans fall on the side of, Let's solve the problem and not worry about the Constitution," he said.

Locking on a position, sometimes confounding members of her party, and letting the chips fall where they may have defined Ms. Brewer's style since she unexpectedly vaulted from secretary of state to governor 15 months ago when [Janet Napolitano](#), a Democrat, left to join the Obama administration as homeland security secretary.

To the public, Ms. Brewer, 65, is a smiling, deeply tanned, affable "cheerleader type," as one friend described her. She may fumble and grimace her way through news conferences, but she genuinely likes shaking constituents' hands and startling state employees on field visits by chatting them up.

To aides and insiders, she is a meticulous political scorekeeper who may not grasp the finer points of policy — opponents wonder if she is in the sway of consultants — but sweats details like whether campaign volunteers have the right shirts on and relishes proving doubters wrong.

Until now, she had rarely made waves — supporters struggled to name one headline-grabbing thing she was known for before becoming governor — despite spending more than 25 years in public service. And opponents wonder whether her coterie of aides has undue influence, noting she had never made immigration control a passion until it was clear that she was running for election.

She did not even mention the border or immigration in her January 2009 inaugural speech, which focused squarely on the biggest problem on her hands, the imploding economy and a state budget in tatters.

But Ms. Brewer in her short tenure may already be remembered for shaking up the political order, even before her decision on the immigration bill.

First, to help close a \$2.6 billion budget deficit and avoid harsh cuts, she shocked and angered the conservative flank that had buoyed her by pushing for a 1-cent increase in the state sales tax.

Chuck Coughlin, a political consultant who worked on her [transition team](#), recalled how Ms. Brewer, as she contemplated the tax increase last year, spent 20 minutes in a meeting explaining how she could not stomach expected deep cuts in education.

“She knew the tax was the only option on the table,” Mr. Coughlin said. “I told her she will have no friends, that not even the Democrats will help you because they want you to roast in the fire. But she did it.”

The proposal, Proposition 100, goes before voters on May 18.

Then, what is accepted as the country’s most stringent immigration enforcement law, allowing the local police to stop and check the immigration papers of noncitizens and making it a state crime not to have them, was making its way through the Legislature.

Legislators said Ms. Brewer, who is seeking a full term, was long prepared to sign such a bill, and her closest opponents in the primary all backed it. But her staff members hashed over the details with Senator [Russell Pearce](#), a Republican who has made driving illegal immigrants out of the state his passion.

Though not closely allied with Mr. Pearce, she took up his mantra that the law would help the police weed out criminals.

“Border-related violence and crime due to illegal immigration are critically important issues to the people of our state,” she said on Friday after signing the immigration bill. “We cannot sacrifice our safety to the murderous greed of drug cartels. We cannot stand idly by as drop houses, kidnappings and violence compromise our quality of life.”

Ms. Brewer said she had pushed for language that explicitly bars the police from racial profiling, though that failed to mollify civil rights groups who complained that Latino citizens would inevitably be harassed or mistaken for illegal immigrants.

As Arizona secretary of state, Ms. Brewer supported Proposition 200, an initiative passed in 2004 requiring proof of citizenship to register to vote.

But as a more a business-oriented, “country club” Republican, she never made the issue a central theme.

Paul Senseman, who has known Ms. Brewer for 16 years and is her spokesman (he declined to make her available for an interview), said her early years had been formative in forging a fiscally conservative, business-minded approach.

Janice Kay Drinkwine was born Sept. 26, 1944, in Hollywood, Calif., and raised in Southern California for most of her young life by a single mother. Her father died at a young age, and her mother ran a dress shop where she and her siblings worked long hours.

“She got a very direct and deep appreciate for small business,” Mr. Senseman said.

Ms. Brewer is fond of invoking her parents’ struggles in casting herself as unafraid of challenges.

She married John Brewer, a chiropractor, and settled in the Phoenix area in the early 1970s, faithfully attending her Lutheran church — before announcing big decisions she often mentions that she prayed over them — and

attending meetings related to her three children's schools. That is where the spark of political activism was fired.

"She would come home and ask, who the hell are these people?" Mr. Coughlin said.

The Brewers had three sons, one of whom died in 2007.

Ms. Brewer has spent the last 27 years in elected politics — as a member of both houses of the Arizona Legislature over a 14-year span, as a Maricopa County supervisor, as secretary of state for seven years and as governor — but she has rarely sought the limelight.

State Senator Ken Chevront, a veteran Democratic legislator who has known her for 16 years, said he had initially dismissed her as an ardent, conservative partisan.

But as governor, Mr. Chevront said, "I am surprised she has become much more pragmatic."

He saw that in her decision on the tax increase and to an extent her decision to support the immigration bill, despite the negative attention from national civil rights, religious and immigrant advocacy leaders.

"She is in Arizona running for governor as Republican at a time when Republicans are being controlled by different, conservative factions," he said.

Mary Rose Wilcox, a Democrat who served with her on the Board of Supervisors, said she had warmed to Ms. Brewer when they worked together to improve services to the homeless and the mentally ill.

But, Ms. Wilcox said, political considerations were never far from her mind, and Ms. Brewer kept close score on who was supporting which piece of legislation. She has approved much of the socially conservative legislation, including abortion restrictions, promoted by the Center for Arizona Policy, a conservative research group.

"Jan has always been a tough cookie and very partisan," she said. "I think what led her to this decision on the immigration bill was political, cold calculation. She felt the Hispanic community would not matter."

But Ms. Brewer's supporters said the decision was bound to be trouble for her no matter how she decided, either costing support in her primary if she vetoed it or generating the wrath of Latinos and moderates if she signed it.

"I know," said Mr. Woods, 56, the former state attorney general who is also co-chairman of Ms. Brewer's election campaign, "that she struggled greatly with the decision."