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By Heather Haddon



N.J. Gov. [Chris Christie](#) signs an executive order as former Gov. Thomas Kean, left, looks on during a news conference in Trenton, N.J., in 2010.

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Cuba. China. Aspen. Newark.

It's a hodgepodge of locations, and former Gov. Tom Kean has visited all of them in recent years in his varied civic life [since leaving political office](#) in 1990 after two terms as New Jersey's chief executive.

And though the Republican spends plenty of time in corporate boardrooms, the 79-year-old has also shown an interest in getting involved on the edgier side of the environmental movement.

Mr. Kean developed a love of the environment early in life. His father could name just about every species of tree and his brother is a life-long member of the National Audubon Society, he said. One of his proudest accomplishments as governor was cleaning up the Jersey Shore and getting tourists to return, starring in television ads where he walked along the beach in swimming clothes.

In his civic life, Mr. Kean sat on the board of the World Wildlife Fund.

About 10 years ago, Mr. Kean said a friend encouraged him to be a bit more aggressive with his environmentalism and consider the Environmental Defense Fund. The nonprofit has embraced the fight against climate change, among other issues.

Now on its board of trustees, Mr. Kean has traveled to Cuba twice as part of an effort to preserve mangroves and fish habitats there.

"We are very quiet about it. We don't do it as a political thing," Mr. Kean said. "It's trying to preserve one of the most important pieces of the environment in this hemisphere."

Another Communist country is one of Mr. Kean's top concerns. Soon after he stepped down as governor, Mr. Kean said he asked his friend, former National Security Advisor [Henry Kissinger](#), to help him deepen an involvement in China that began in New Jersey.

Since then Mr. Kean has been the vice chairman of the National Committee on United States-China Relations for years and is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations.

"I can't tell you how many times I've been to China," Mr. Kean said.

His civic life has also included domestic and local concerns, such as chairing the 9/11 Commission, leading the board of the Carnegie Corporation of New York and heading a New Jersey education reform group. A former Essex County resident, Mr. Kean also supports the arts and parks in Newark.

"He's still busy," said Carl Golden, senior contributing analyst at the Richard Stockton College of New Jersey and Mr. Kean's former press secretary, about his old boss. "He's what people in public life and service should be about."

Earlier this month, Mr. Kean attended the Aspen Ideas festival conference in Colorado, while Gov. Chris Christie was in Aspen with other Republican governors last Wednesday and Thursday.

"They told me he's coming and I said I'm going," Mr. Kean said.

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