

Kelly explains job with US data security firm

Security

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Former Labor MP Mike Kelly has flagged building Australia's economic sovereignty and disaster resilience as key priorities in his move to the private sector, dismissing claims he's working for a data-mining company.

The Eden-Monaro MP quit federal politics on April 30, retiring due to health problems linked to his time serving with the Army in Iraq. This week he confirmed he had taken a new role with Silicon Valley-based data giant Palantir Technologies.

The \$US20 billion (\$30.8 billion) company, known for close links with Western intelligence agencies, has appointed Dr Kelly to lead and expand its Australian operations.

"They offered the life raft of continuing to work by coming on board with them," Dr Kelly said. "They're prepared

to bend over backwards to accommodate my health issues.

"I met these guys who went on board with Palantir in Iraq, who I love to death. We kept each other sane and they were doing great work."

Registered in Australia in 2010, the company has some 50 people working in Sydney, Melbourne, Wellington and Canberra.

A former Army officer, Dr Kelly won the one-time bellwether NSW seat of Eden-Monaro in 2007, lost it in 2013, before retaking it three years later.

Palantir has worked with the Australian Defence Department, the US National Security Agency and CIA. It is backed by a group including billionaire PayPal co-founder Peter Thiel.

Supplying software for intelligence, finance, law enforcement, insurance, corporate services and pharmaceuticals, its name comes from the "seeing stones" described in JRR Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*.



Mike Kelly: "They haven't recruited me for my parliamentary experience; they've recruited me for 33 years working on security issues." PHOTO: ALEX ELLINGHAUSEN

Dr Kelly said there was no probity problem with his appointment, given he hadn't held a ministerial portfolio in government since 2013. His work on Parliament's powerful Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security (PJCIS) was not a conflict of interest, he said. "They haven't recruited me for my par-

liamentary experience, they've recruited me for 33 years working on security issues."

"Palantir is working for every agency here and they have much better knowledge of what's going on than any opposition member of PJCIS is ever going to be exposed to."

Dr Kelly won't be required to register as a lobbyist, due to his role as full-time employee.

He said expanding the company in Australia, developing links with research organisations and universities and helping protect against terrorism were priorities.

The company is working on responses to COVID-19 around the world.

"I want to channel a lot of our effort into preventing and managing disasters. They're doing some of that now in the US, and effectively integrating and managing the energy grid and resources so we can bring in 100 per cent renewable energy," Dr Kelly said.

"I want us to be able to contribute to sovereign capabilities. We've been talking a lot about national resilience and I think we've got a big role to play in that."

He said working to make Australian companies more competitive would be a key focus, as well as helping financial institutions navigate transaction and financing laws.

"I also believe we can help with better delivery of services, particularly curing the problems we've seen with robo-debt, the census and the ATO," Dr Kelly added.

The Eden-Monaro byelection is expected in late June or early July.