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Here is the second item from my "Albany Insider" column today:

Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver's chief counsel has raised eyebrows by hiring the law partner of Gov. Cuomo's former chief of staff to represent him in a state ethics probe into a controversial sexual harassment settlement.

Silver counsel Jim Yates quietly hired Paul Schectman, a longtime associate and highly regarded white-collar criminal defense lawyer who served as criminal justice director under then-Gov. George Pataki, sources said.

Schectman is now a law partner at Zuckerman Spaeder with Steven Cohen, Cuomo's former chief of staff in the attorney general's and governor's offices.

The hiring of Schectman troubles those who believe the state ethics commission is too closely aligned with Cuomo. Yates has already appeared before commission investigators looking into a \$103,000 settlement he helped negotiate for Silver involving two staffers who accused Assemblyman Vito Lopez (D-Brooklyn) of sexually harassing them.

"This is the old boys' network at work, revolving doors, insiders peddling influence and little credibility of a truly independent investigation," said one insider. "Business as usual in Albany."

But Dick Dadey, executive director of Citizens Union, said the arrangement doesn't raise concerns for him. "The legal community is so interconnected and ethics of conduct are pretty strong," Dadey said, before adding that it makes sense for Yates to retain someone who "knows government better than most and has a background in handling ethics issues."

Schectman refused to comment. Yates did not return calls.