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State political analysts surprised at accusations, question charges against Silver

NEW PALTZ - He's admired almost as much as he's resented by his fellow Democrats. He's been a matchless negotiator and political tactician of the first tier.

When Sheldon Silver plays his role as one of Albany's "three men in a room" who rule the state roost, he's often considered the smartest of the three.

And now Silver is facing a life in prison after being accused of taking millions of dollars in bribes and kickbacks.

To Gerald Benjamin, the charges that could end Silver's career don't add up.

And to Alan Chartock, those charges are going to be a tough sell in any case.

"I was shocked," Benjamin said Thursday. "The cost-benefit equation doesn't make sense."

Benjamin is director of the Center for Regional Education and Development at SUNY New Paltz and the author of several influential books on state politics.

Benjamin said that though he doesn't know him personally, he's a great admirer of Silver's. Even before he gained the speaker's position, Benjamin said Silver was an adept politician who honed his skills to a fine edge in the tumultuous world of Albany politics.

"I'm really surprised - I want to see what the charges are," Benjamin said.

Chartock is president and chief executive of WAMC/Northeast Public Radio and host of the station's "Capital Connection" commentary program. He said he was also shocked by Silver's arrest and, like Benjamin, he has questions about the charges.

"He's a smart guy. To put himself in that position would seem pretty stupid," he said. "But then, the prisons are full of people like that."

Chartock said the charge that Silver had somehow accepted millions in bribes and graft would be hard to prove in court.

"Unless someone talks into a microphone, it's not an easy case."

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Gerald Benjamin, the director for Regional Education and Development at SUNY New Paltz, said he admired Sheldon Silver and was surprised about the federal accusations of taking bribes and kickbacks against the Assembly Speaker. Times Herald-Record file

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