

## Nick Kotik and House Blue Dogs

Democratic Rep. Nick Kotik of Coraopolis formed the Legislature's "Blue Dog" caucus about a year ago, when divisive social issues resurfaced in the House. Its members felt their caucus was going too far to the left on social issues including gun control, abortion and gay rights. Some socially conservative Democrats balked at discussions about a left-leaning social agenda and discussed banding together to oppose it. But it took Rendell's tax-hike plan to induce the group's first formal meeting.

The group of mostly Western Pennsylvania lawmakers has been a key player in this year's budget debate – opposing Governor Rendell's huge tax increase and more spending and offering a dissenting voice to the House Democrat leadership.

Kotik modeled the caucus after the Blue Dogs in Congress, a powerful group of about 60 conservative Democrats.

The Blue Dogs' \$27.5 billion state spending plan – developed with House Democrat colleagues and House GOP leaders - raises no new taxes, keeps spending \$400 million or so lower than Rendell will likely accept and proposes new state funding for basic K-12 public education to an increase of about a third of what Rendell requested.

Kotik, like Senate Republicans and many members of the House, are in disbelief that Rendell and the House Democrat leaders are still trying to pass new taxes and increase spending during the current recession.

I believe Kotik and the Blue Dogs' are looking for alternatives to taxing Pennsylvanians at a time when they can least afford it – which is also the goal of the Senate and House Republicans – and I fully support their efforts, as should every Pennsylvanian.