

Emboldened House Republicans who refrained from criticizing President Barack Obama earlier this year have unanimously rejected Democratic bills on spending, taxes and financial regulatory reform in December.

After having nine Republicans defect on climate change this summer and Rep. Joseph Cao (R-La.) backing the House healthcare bill last month, Republican leaders united against other high-profile bills over the last couple of weeks.

A GOP leadership aide noted the president's approval rating has dipped under 50 percent, adding that approval ratings for the Democratic-led Congress are much lower.

On Friday, the House passed a regulatory reform bill, 223-202, with 27 Democrats voting no. The House also passed an omnibus measure, 221-202, with 28 Democrats rejecting it. And earlier this month, an estate tax cut extender cleared 225-200, with 26 Democrats defecting. Not one Republican backed any of the measures, which are all supported by the White House.

The rhetoric employed by House Republicans toward Obama has gotten more aggressive in the latter half of 2009. Even though every House Republican rejected Obama's stimulus in January and again in February, GOP lawmakers at that time directed their criticism at congressional leaders, not the president.

Democrats call Republicans hypocritical for opposing Democratic initiatives aimed at stimulating the economy, pointing to the GOP's fiscal record when it controlled Congress and the White House between 1995 and 2006.

Special Assistant to the Speaker Rep. Chris Van Hollen (D-Md.) noted that while Republicans have been attacking his caucus for adding to the deficit, they voted this month to make the estate tax cut permanent.

In an interview with The Hill, Van Hollen said, "It's interesting to hear the Republicans say that,

less than a week after they said they wanted to dramatically expand the deficit by permanently lifting the estate tax, they just voted for a deficit-exploding measure. So they are in no position to lecture anybody, given it's because of their irresponsible track record that we are in this position."

Republicans argue that the vote was a symbolic one, pointing out that the measure had no chance of passing the lower chamber.

The GOP surge in unity comes as Democrats face internecine battles over the president's plan to send 30,000 additional troops to Afghanistan and over healthcare reform.

Republicans have relished the Democratic infighting, including a spirited conversation between House Judiciary Committee Chairman John Conyers Jr. (D-Mich.) and Obama. Conyers told The Hill that the president asked him to stop "demeaning" him.

The House GOP's unity has complicated a possible Democratic strategy to attach language on increasing the national debt limit to the politically popular defense-spending bill.

Democratic leaders have been "discussing" such a plan, according to leadership aides.

On Monday, 174 House Republicans sent a letter to Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) vowing to oppose the spending measure if the debt increase were attached to it.

"House Republicans stand ready to help the majority enact a defense bill that meets the needs of our troops, but we will not assist your effort to use the troops to enact an increase in our national debt limit so as to finance the irresponsible spending policies of your party," the letter stated.

The only GOP members who did not sign it were Reps. Walter Jones (N.C.), Ron Paul (Texas) and John Campbell (Calif.).

That letter follows a similar note signed by all GOP House appropriators.

House Appropriations Defense subcommittee Chairman John Murtha (D-Pa.) said that he counseled his colleagues not to include the deal-breaking provision to the conference report.

“It’s the Republicans you have to worry about. They’ll vote against it if it has [the] jobs bill [attached] and if it has the debt extension, that’s for sure,” Murtha told The Hill in an interview on Friday.