Mr. Chairman, my colleagues and guests of the Conference:

I could just about break out into song! If I did, it would have to be "The Lord is My Shepherd" for my father told me many times as a young man that when I look with such good favor upon me as he has here today, I should first pause! acknowledge, give thanks and then walk humbly in His sight.

That is where I have to begin my stewardship as your newly elected leader.

I'm deeply indebted to those of you who worked hard and long in my behalf and I'm so grateful for the friendships we've forged in this House over the years and for the expressions of confidence from those we've come to know for only a comparatively short period of time.

To you, Guy, and your supporters. It's been a lengthy, spirited, intensive, but friendly campaign! I compliment you for waging it on a high plane! I'm confident there are no scars, no bitterness or ill feelings among us! May I further assure you that Bob Michel keeps no little black book in his bottom desk drawer! I don't believe in recriminations! The large green book of ideas and plans I have for the future include each and every one of you.

John Rhodes tribute

How do I perceive my leadership role?

First of all, I look upon it as a role to be shared by those you will elect to fill out our leadership ranks! We do that for the purpose of dividing up the responsibilities around here and I personally like to delegate additional authority to those willing and able to lend a helping hand!

Secondly, I do not personally crave the spotlight of public attention! What I am interested in is seeing to it that the spotlight is focused on the vast array of individual talent we have assembled here in this room! My job is to orchestrate your many talents in such a way as to give us the best possible overall performance rating!
To use the symphonic analogy, I know some of you prefer speaking softly as strings, others more vocally as woodwinds, some very loudly as brass and finally those boisterous ones for percussion, but in any event, the measure of our success will be how well we harmonize and work together.

Having said that, I want to take this opportunity to remind everyone before curtain time that we are going to be performing under one serious handicap.

Notwithstanding our great victories in winning the White House and control of the Senate, we Republicans are still outnumbered in this House 243 to 192. That's a 51 vote Democratic majority!

We deserve a 4 to 5 ratio on committees, but the Democratic majority still has the power and the votes to work their will particularly on Rules, Ways and Means and Appropriations.

We do have some leverage now with a Republican Senate that we have not had for a quarter of a century and with a Republican President our majority role will be considerably different than during the past 4 years.

Instead of responding to the will of a Democratic President and a Democratic majority in the Congress and playing a defensive -- sometimes obstructive -- role, we are going to have to get on the offensive, be constructive, affirmative and positive, for our bottom line has got to be the enactment of the Reagan program.

With the Democrats losing the White House and control of the Senate, I think it's quite obvious they will attempt to make their case in the House where they still have a numerical majority. If they decide to gut any part of the Reagan program, the battle will be fought in our House.

Our strategy will be one of beginning with negotiation not only at the top, but right down to the sub-committee level where I intend to strengthen the lines of communication in the House, with our counterparts in the Senate and with the White House.
With or without negotiations we will be continually probing across the aisle and I'd like to count upon your volunteering to help strategize and execute commando raids for votes from the other side on specific pieces of legislation.

If their strategy is to dig in and make a fight of it, then of course we have confrontation. I would hope for the sake of the President-elect's program, that those occasions would be held to a minimum, but in any event, we will be prepared to mix it up.

I've never run away from a fight in my life and that includes a lot of scrapes and one mugging incident. In any kind of confrontation, I'd like to think we're going to win most on philosophical grounds and lose some by sheer weight of numbers.

If we lose and the issues are important ones for the American people, those issues will be highlighted for public debate in the Congressional campaign of 1982.

And in looking ahead to 1982 let me conclude with one or two observations. After serving 24 years in this House, always as a member of the minority, I'm getting mighty sick and tired of that designation.

As a matter of fact, I never particularly liked being called the Minority Whip and would prefer now to be called your Republican Leader. I hope those elected to leadership positions with me will take the same attitude. I want to expel the word "minority" from our vocabulary and bury it for all time.

I'm really excited about the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead of us to prove to the American people that we are deserving of becoming a ruling party in this House.

Guy, it was a healthy contest. I know it will make me a stronger leader and I look forward to the opportunity to prove it.

Thank you all once again for the great honor you do me and my family in electing me your Leader.