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Rhodes Bars Defensive Stance For Republicans in 1974 Races

By RICHARD L. MADDEN

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WASHINGTON, Feb. 22 — The House minority leader, John J. Rhodes, sounding an upbeat theme for Republican congressional candidates, said today that 1974 "does not have to be the disastrous political year for Republicans that many people proclaim it will."

The Arizona Republican, who spoke at a National Press Club luncheon, said that the branch of government up for judgment by the voters this fall would not be "the Republican executive" but the Democratic Congress.

"And the Congress is in pretty bad shape," he said.

Mr. Rhodes succeeded Vice President Ford as the House Republican leader last December and has been campaigning actively for Republican Congressional candidates.

He said that the Republicans would not be on the defensive in this "year of Watergate" and added:

"And why should we? The official Republican party had nothing whatsoever to do with the disgraceful abuses that took

place in 1972. We intend to take the offensive. We are going into every district to tell the people that the only way they can get Congress off dead center is to change the guard—break up the old crony club. We are going to take the Democratic party's Congressional record to the people and make their candidates wear it around their necks during the campaign."

As an example, Mr. Rhodes accused the Democrats in Congress of failure to complete action on a bill giving the President emergency powers to deal with the energy shortage. "The Democrats just can't seem to settle their internal squabbling in the public interest long enough to see vital legislation through," he said.

The energy bill passed the Senate last Tuesday but Administration officials have warned that President Nixon will veto it in its present form.

Mr. Rhodes, who did not mention Mr. Nixon by name in his prepared text, said the question facing the voters in November "is not which party is best fit to run the executive branch—that one is for two years from now. This November, the question is which party is best equipped to run the Congress?"

He acknowledged that his party faced "unusual problems" this year and said that "any Republican who is not scared in this political year—indeed, any incumbent of either party who is not scared—does not understand what this political year is all about."