

Big Problems in San Diego

By Rowland Evans and Robert Novak

WASHINGTON—Bluffing or not, political agents of President Nixon this week are issuing an ultimatum to San Diego: become more cooperative or, even at this late date, we shall move the 1972 Republican National Convention to another city.

Private negotiations in San Diego indicate their patience is gone. Specifically at issue is whether the San Diego arena can be ready by the Aug. 21 convention opening. Beyond that, Mr. Nixon's agents are fed up with what they regard as price-gouging obstructionism and lethargy in San Diego.

THESE SENTIMENTS are voiced on a level considerably higher in the Republican hierarchy than State Sen. Robert Knowles of Wisconsin, the convention coordinator. Indeed, Knowles' memorandum suggesting a possible new convention city was leaked to the press last week by high Republican officials without his knowledge.

Unless they get satisfaction this week from the hitherto intractable arena owners, they warn immediate steps will be taken toward a new convention site — most likely Miami Beach, where the Democrats meet in July, although a third, unnamed city is under consideration.

An eleventh hour transfer would be welcomed by many Republican politicians, who now feel San Diego is linked — irrevocably, if unfairly — to the ITT affair. Nor would

there be objection from Republican National Committee members who had San Diego rammed down their throats by the White House.

One reason for their objections was the expense to the party in getting San Diego ready for the convention. The figure has now climbed to an undisclosed \$2.5 million, compared with \$800,000 for 1968. The arena construction costs alone, \$87,000 in 1968, now are at \$854,000. Ever since San Diego was selected, the Nixon men feel, contractors and union leaders have been trying to milk the Republican Party for every last cent.

Besides, the President's agents are uneasy over possible union picket lines around three big non-union hotels — the Town and Country, the Bahia and the Catalamaran.

Dick Herman, Republican National Committeeman from Nebraska and vice chairman of the convention's arrangements committee, received a letter from San Diego contractor Stoddard Martin in which Martin estimated \$220,000 to ready the arena in four weeks, but then added:

"Even if the above money is available to do this work we cannot guarantee completion in four weeks."

To begin work June 1 would cost the Republicans up to \$3500 a day. Also the arena is booked for June and July, and its owners are refusing to let the Republicans have access then for any price.