Maryland Congressman Steny Hoyer called on NASA Tuesday to go ahead with plans to send a robot to service the Hubble Space Telescope while officials from the space agency said such a mission likely won't happen due to proposed budget cuts.

Hubble, which is operated out of Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, is scheduled for maintenance in late 2007 or 2008. NASA had once planned to repair worn out parts with either a manned space mission or using a robotic arm that would attach itself to the telescope.

However, President Bush eliminated funding for a repair mission in his 2006 budget and only set aside money to send Hubble into a death swoon into the Earth's atmosphere.

Hoyer, a Democrat whose district includes Goddard and many of the 700 NASA employees and private contractors who work on Hubble, said the president's budget overlooked the contributions that the space-borne telescope has made to astronomy. He said funding should be restored for an additional mission.

"This is a very important mission for us to continue and complete," he said during a tour of the Hubble lab, which holds the robotic arm that could be used to fix the telescope.

But Al Diaz, NASA's Associate Administrator for Science who was on the same tour, said the agency has no plans to send a mission, manned or robotic, to repair Hubble.

"We don't intend on servicing it, that's where we are," Diaz said.

Launched in 1990 and orbiting the Earth, Hubble initially suffered numerous problems. But it has since provided scientists with glimpses deep into space and the universe's past. Hubble has detected some of the most distant objects ever recorded.

Space shuttle astronauts have made four trips to Hubble to fix it, but the prospect of another manned mission dimmed after the 2003 Columbia accident that put a halt temporary halt to

future shuttle launches.

Goddard scientists have adapted robotic technology developed for the orbiting space station to use on a repair mission to Hubble. The plan calls for an unmanned spacecraft to dock with Hubble and extend a robotic arm controlled by technicians on Earth that would perform tasks.

Late last year a National Academy of Sciences panel recommended one more mission to Hubble. Without further repairs, Goddard officials say Hubble could still be useful to scientists for at least two more years. It would eventually fall out of orbit sometime around 2013, according to Preston Burch, Hubble's program manager.

Even if the repair mission is canceled, NASA officials said the robotic technology can still be used for other purposes.

"If the mission never happens, we've still learned so much about the technology," said Frank Cepollina, the deputy associate director of Hubble.