

IEEE-USA Supports Prolonging Life of Hubble

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NASA should explore all possible avenues toward prolonging the useful life of the Hubble Space Telescope, IEEE-USA said today in a statement to the House Science Committee. The most urgent need is a servicing mission to refurbish and upgrade the Hubble so that it can continue gathering high-resolution images of astronomical objects. News reports, however, indicate that The White House might eliminate mission funding from its 2006 budget request.

“The Hubble telescope has resulted in some of the most important scientific discoveries in the last decade,” said Dr. Russell Lefevre, IEEE-USA vice president, technology policy. “Our understanding of the universe has grown immensely, and it would be a tragedy for the world’s scientific community if the servicing mission was cancelled.”

Launched on 25 April 1990 by the crew of the Space Shuttle Discovery, the Hubble is a cooperative program of NASA and the European Space Agency to operate a space-based observatory for the benefit of science and humanity. Just last year, it detected more than 100 planets around distant stars, captured images of distant galaxies and recorded the first images of the edge of the known universe. Space-shuttle astronauts have serviced the Hubble four times, the last servicing in 2002.

A service mission would keep the Hubble operational until the James Webb Space Telescope is launched in 2011, at the earliest. Without such a mission, the 2.4-meter reflecting telescope could stop sending its photos as early as 2007.

“Prospects for continued operation of Hubble until that date without a servicing mission are small,” the IEEE-USA statement said. “The absence of the Hubble’s extraordinary abilities would adversely impact astronomical research.”

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