“Moving an asteroid is a huge idea,” according to scientists at the Keck Institute for Space Studies at the California Institute of Technology, who should know. “Never has a celestial object been moved by humans.”

Yet these rocket scientists think it would be possible to send a robotic spacecraft to capture a small asteroid, perhaps 22 to 32 feet in diameter and about 500 tons, and move it somewhere near the Moon, where astronauts could fly out and study it, maybe by 2021. The idea was formalized in a report in 2012, and NASA appears ready to move forward; Aviation Week was the first to report that the agency’s 2014 budget request included $100 million for a new mission to go get that rock.

President Obama has already said that he’d like astronauts to go out and visit a local asteroid (a type of “near-Earth object,” in NASA parlance) by 2025.

The 2012 report, called the Asteroid Retrieval Feasibility Study, said that grabbing such a rock and tugging it closer to home would give astronauts a “unique, meaningful and affordable” destination, as Senator Bill Nelson, the Florida Democrat who is himself a former astronaut, pointed out in a news release on Friday. Mr. Nelson called the plan “part of what will be a much broader program,” combining “the science of mining an asteroid, along with developing ways to deflect one, along with giving people a place to develop ways we can go to Mars.”

A government briefing on the mission refers to the asteroid, charmingly, as a “noncooperative space object” and adds: “The prospect of capturing, transporting and then visiting an asteroid — robotically and with human interaction — has an intrinsic appeal for much of the public.” No mention of what the asteroid’s Twitter hashtag might be.

DEVELOPMENTS

PUBLIC HEALTH

New Avian Flu Threat
How serious is the bird flu that is circulating in China? Nobody knows for sure, but at least seven people have died and more have been sickened. So far the virus does not appear to have spread from human to human, just from birds to people. In China, 20,000 birds were slaughtered at a wholesale market in Shanghai where a pigeon was found to have the virus, called H7N9. And at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, work is under way on a seed vaccine for this strain of flu, but “only as a precaution,” a spokesman said.

PHYSICS

A Glimpse of Dark Matter
Dark matter is thought to exist copiously throughout the universe, serving as the gravitational glue that holds galaxies and other heavenly things together. But so far it has existed only in theory: no one has actually seen it. Last week some physicists claimed they were getting close. The Alpha Magnetic Spectrometer, a spectacular machine on the International Space Station that was lovingly crafted by the Nobel laureate Samuel Ting of M.I.T., confirmed earlier reports of excessive numbers of antimatter particles that could be coming from collisions of dark matter or other “new physical phenomena.” Dr. Ting said more data was needed to tell whether the antimatter was being produced by dark matter or by unknown astrophysical objects like pulsars.

NEUROSCIENCE

A Map of the Brain
It’s always our federal dollars that support research, but the administration is also looking at funding a new initiative, Thrive, which will provide a map of the human brain, for some. Some are scratching how the $100 million will be spent, but the program is expected to cost more than $400 million. The government spends year after year on research. But the Nobel-winning Columbia University researcher, Dr. Irvington, was only a single example of how the brain works, he said.