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Feb. 24, 2013

Feb. 23 — In front of a crowd of more than 100, TSA spokesman Nico Melendez talked at Saturday's L.A. Times Travel Show about changes in progress and changes to come at the 11-year-old agency, a longtime hot button issue for travelers.

Melendez, who has been with the TSA since its inception after 9/11, appears again Sunday in a 1 p.m. session moderated by L.A. Times travel staffer and columnist Chris Erskine.

In Saturday's session, Melendez discussed and showed visuals of the upgraded full-body scanners in use across LAX since October. The new scanners, he said, are not as revealing as the former scanners, which received criticism for years for the level of personal detail evident during scans. A slide of the new images is on display at the show.

Melendez also spoke of the advantages of the relatively new TSA Cares program, which allows arrangements in advance for special treatment for those with medical or age-related checkpoint needs. He also touted the TSA Pre-Check program, which allows frequent travelers to skip steps in the typical checkpoint process. A show of hands showed that few in the audience had participated in the program.

As with last year's appearance, Melendez brought boxes of the hundreds of items left behind on a daily basis at TSA checkpoints, including car keys and passports. Melendez assured travelers that such items can be reclaimed if requests are made soon after travel.

The Navy veteran has been with the TSA for 11 years and oversees public affairs for the TSA in California, Arizona and Hawaii. He has served in the administration of President George W. Bush as public affairs special assistant at the Department of

Transportation and at the Department of Homeland Security. His military awards

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