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Democratic congressional candidates take aim at Valadao, each other

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Amanda Renteria touted her San Joaquin Valley roots and John Hernandez pushed for building more infrastructure as the two Democratic candidates for the 21st Congressional District visited the "First Look with Scott Cox" show Monday.

Renteria and Hernandez are running against Rep. David Valadao, R-Hanford, in a Latino-majority district that leans heavily Democratic in voter registration.

Valadao was invited to the show but not able to attend.

Strong Democratic registration didn't do Hernandez any good in 2012 when his poorly funded campaign was handily defeated by Valadao.

Hernandez said his campaign, this time around, is gaining momentum as it works to connect with voters "on their front porches" and "at barbecues."

He has failed to file required campaign finance paperwork for a year, but said he will post updated records about how much campaign money he has raised and spent by the April 15 reporting deadline.

But he downplayed the need for large volumes of campaign cash and criticized Valadao and Renteria for taking "special interest money" from the Washington elite.

Renteria, who has Democratic Party support for her race, has a pedigree as a U.S. Senate staffer and expects to bring in millions to support her effort. She will likely face similar financial power from the Valadao campaign.

She dismissed Hernandez's criticism of the need for campaign cash and said it is critical to getting her message to voters.

Renteria noted that Republicans have done well in the district and similar districts in the valley.

The key to winning is to get voters of the district out to the polls especially the substantial number of voters who are younger and not engaged in voting or politics.

But she said it is about more than doing well in the June 3 primary.

Young voters are the future of the San Joaquin Valley, she said, and getting them involved is important for the valley's future.

Hernandez said he is committed to economic growth in the San Joaquin Valley, that hydrologic fracturing is poisoning valley water and that Valadao is waffling on supporting legislation that offers immigrants a path to citizenship -- something Hernandez supports.

He said Renteria is not a local candidate as she has spent her working life in Washington, D.C.

But Renteria said her roots in her home town of Sanger are deep. She and her husband, who is teaching at Fresno State, are raising their children there.

What she brought back from Washington, D.C., she said, was an understanding of how that city and its politics work -- something that will be critical to representing the San Joaquin Valley.

But she agreed with Hernandez that Valadao's support for immigration reform has been inconsistent and said the congressman needs to take action to make the legislation happen - - not just sign on to support a bill.