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Virginians help campaigns in N.H. ahead of Tuesday's primary

KATHLEEN LEES, Special correspondent

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Britt Curley
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For Richmond native Britt Curley, this is — in the campaign's slogan — "Newt Hampshire." She's excited, Curley said, to help former House Speaker Newt Gingrich try to win the GOP presidential nomination and beat President Barack Obama in November. She sings Gingrich's praises.

"He has reformed welfare. He's cut taxes. I think he's the only guy that can take on Obama and bring change to Washington," Curley said.

Curley is one of the scores of Virginians in New Hampshire working for Gingrich and other presidential candidates ahead of Tuesday's primary. Some are staff members. Some are volunteers. All are drawn by the excitement of a national campaign and the possibility of helping to change their country.

They ring doorbells. They answer reporters' questions. They paint signs. They live on caffeine and pizza — and little sleep. In many ways, they are the backbone and muscle of modern American politics.

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At Texas Rep. Ron Paul's campaign headquarters in Concord, Kate Schackai is the media coordinator. She's a native of Paris, Va., and moved to Wentworth, N.H., six years ago.

"I grew up a Democrat," Schackai said. "But I converted in college and became a conservative before I encountered Dr. Paul." Schackai and many other Paul supporters refer to him by his medical title. In addition to being a member of Congress, he is an obstetrician and gynecologist.

A typical day, Schackai said, means waking at 7 a.m. and going to bed at midnight. As she describes her work, volunteers handle the phones, rush in and out of the office, and get ready to go door to door.

"I think the excitement you see from voters really energizes Dr. Paul," Schackai said. "It energizes us."

Joshua Sacks, 23, of Arlington County, who works as an information technology consultant in Washington, drove to Manchester to volunteer for former Utah Gov. Jon Huntsman.

On his second day in New Hampshire, Sacks went door to door getting the word out.

"This is the first time I feel like it matters," Sacks said. "I think Huntsman is the only one with experience and intellect to take the country out of the hole that it's in."

Curley, 26, came to Gingrich's campaign to work with his daughters, Kathy Gingrich Lubbers and Jackie Gingrich Cushman. She coordinates interviews and interactions with the press for Gingrich's campaign.

"I do a hodgepodge of things," Curley said. "It's anything they need, really." A typical day involves putting together press packages and working with the local media.

"My biggest challenge is staying organized," Curley said. But she relishes the challenge, she said. "It's a hundred miles an hour," said Curley, "and I thrive off that."

After New Hampshire, Curley is headed to South Carolina, which holds a Jan. 21 primary, and then Florida, which holds a Jan. 31 primary.

Gingrich, a McLean resident, did not collect enough valid signatures to qualify for Virginia's March 6 Republican primary.

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