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As the race to the White House heats up, lawyers from Am Law 200 firms in early-primary states are gearing up to volunteer for their chosen candidates.

In New Hampshire, Manchester-based Nixon Peabody litigation partner Gordon MacDonald is currently surveying the field and deciding which candidate to back. MacDonald previously served as New Hampshire campaign director, a paid position, for Dan Quayle's presidential run in 2000, and more recently as statewide vice-chair, a volunteer position, for Mitt Romney's presidential run in 2008. "As a paid employee, I ran the operation in New Hampshire, which covered everything, including hiring staff, planning events and trips, organizing volunteers, and handling the press," says MacDonald. "As a volunteer, it's different. It's more about helping reach out to activists."

Across the aisle, Scott O'Connell, MacDonald's close friend and colleague at Nixon Peabody, is part of New England Lawyers for Obama, a joint fund-raising committee for the commander-in-chief and the Democratic National Committee. O'Connell says he plans to do more fund-raising in New Hampshire as the February primary date draws nearer, and will help mobilize voters for Obama's New Hampshire rallies.

Another Democratic New Hampshire-based lawyer, Jackson Lewis partner Daniel Schwarz, says he'll monitor polling places on Election Day for voter irregularities.

In South Carolina, David Wilkins, a Nelson Mullins Riley & Scarborough partner who was a state legislator for 25 years and the U.S. ambassador to Canada under President George W. Bush, is backing Texas governor Rick Perry. "When it comes to South Carolina, I'll participate in whatever activities he wants me to," Wilkins says. The Nelson Mullins partner, who chaired Bush's 2004 campaign in the state, says that he tends to give candidates political, rather than legal, advice, given his prior experience on presidential campaigns. "It's mainly [about] helping to [recruit] volunteers, getting out the vote, giving advice, and making public appearances," says Wilkins.

And further south in Florida, GrayRobinson partner Jason Unger is advising his friend, and GOP presidential candidate Gary Johnson of New Mexico, on election law. Unger is also raising money for Republican state legislators, as well as former U.S. senator George LeMieux, who is once again vying for the U.S. Senate seat in that state. Unger was Rudy Giuliani's 2008 Florida legal counsel, and was a litigation counsel to George W. Bush's campaign during the 2000 Florida recount. "For most hard-core election lawyers, it really is a labor of love," he says. —Victor Li