

Obama at World Trade Center site: 'We come back stronger!'

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Between a campaign speech and a pair of celebrity fundraisers, President Obama put politics aside for a moment Thursday evening to pay tribute to the lives lost in the World Trade Center attack nearly 11 years ago.

Obama toured Freedom Tower, the sleek glass and steel building that is replacing the twin towers at Ground Zero in New York City, and he signed one of the construction beams that will help top off the soon-to-be tallest building in the country.

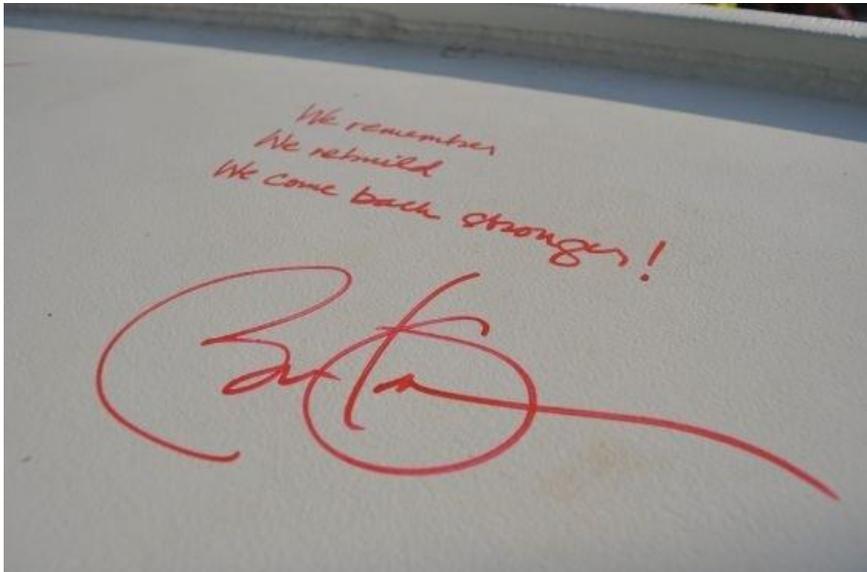
He wrote:

“We remember

we rebuild

we come back stronger!”

And he signed his name in script.



(Pool photo)

Obama was accompanied on the tour by first lady Michelle Obama and three local politicians of varying political stripes: New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo (D), New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie (R), and New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg (I). All three have been rumored to have presidential aspirations.

Obama's tour was advertised as a dry run for a "topping off" ceremony that will be held when the building is completed. In April, Freedom Tower surpassed the Empire State Building to become the tallest building in New York, and it is scheduled to be topped off at 1,776 feet.

In a campaign year, Obama has touted the killing of Osama bin Laden last year, as well as other al Qaeda operatives, as evidence that his administration has been strong on national security. Near the one-year anniversary of bin Laden's death, Obama secretly went to Afghanistan to mark the occasion.

But on this day, Obama did not make political remarks at the site after he and the other dignitaries were taken to the 22nd floor, where they could view the 9/11 Memorial and Hudson River below.

"Its beautiful," Obama said, as he and the first lady gazed out the window and he put a hand behind her back, according to the White House press pool report.

While signing the steel beam, he joked to the group: "Don't mess it up."

He also thanked construction workers for an "incredible structure," adding that "we couldn't be prouder of you guys. This is what the American spirit is all about."

A giant American flag was affixed to the side of the building.