President Barack Obama has spent plenty of time in the Green Lounge, but never before quite like this. On April 7, 2016, the President came back to the Law School to have a conversation with the community—and the world—about the Supreme Court nomination of Merrick Garland. Obama talked with David Strauss, Gerald Ratner Distinguished Service Professor of Law, on a stage specifically constructed in the Green Lounge for the occasion, in a room filled with students, alumni, and friends of both the President and the Law School.

The President looked very much at home in the space where he often talked with students over a beer at Wine Mess, though he did marvel that the students had dressed up for the occasion. Here, we present the event in photos. For a detailed account of the visit, and to see video of the talk (and his impromptu stop in the overflow room), visit www.law.uchicago.edu/news/obama-returns-law-school.
Clockwise from top left:

Gerald Ford, seen here chatting with Dean Edward Levi in the Classroom Wing, was the last President to visit the Law School before President Obama’s visit.

President Theodore Roosevelt laid the cornerstone for the original Law School building, Stuart Hall, in 1903.

Before the President began his event in the Green Lounge, he surprised the students with a visit to the D’Angelo Law Library Reading Room, which functioned as an overflow space where students could watch the event on a big screen.

Professor Strauss, an editor of the Supreme Court Review who has argued 18 cases before the Supreme Court, was an ideal partner in the conversation with the President about the nomination of Judge Merrick Garland.

Due to security screenings and other logistical considerations, audience members were required to arrive very early for the event. Students in the overflow room passed the time reading, studying, socializing, and playing cards.

President Obama spent a few minutes with Dean Thomas Miles, as well as with two deans who were instrumental to his time at the Law School, Douglas Baird and Geoffrey Stone.
Several judges with chambers in Chicago attended the event, including Senior Lecturer Diane Wood, Ann Williams, and Senior Lecturer Richard Posner, all judges on the United States Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit.

Senator Dick Durbin was part of the Illinois Congressional Delegation at the event.

President Obama specifically asked to receive questions from students after his conversation with Professor Strauss. The President called on six students, including Kyle Panton, ’17, who asked what kind of constitutional questions the President considered when choosing a nominee.

Amelia Garza-Mattia, ’18, who asked a question about mass incarceration, also told President Obama that she had had the opportunity to ask him a question at a rally in New Hampshire when she was 15 and he was still a Senator.

A photo of the President speaking at a Law School event hangs outside Classroom V, his favorite room to teach in. When the photo disappeared from the wall shortly before the event, students engaged in rampant speculation as to where it had gone. The answer, as they discovered when it returned to its place, was that the President was kind enough to sign and date the photo mat during his visit.

The Presidential advance team completely transformed the Green Lounge for the event, draping most of the windows, erecting a stage and risers, and creating spaces for audience, media, and security.

Over 175 students attended the “watch party” in the Reading Room. Rumors had spread that the President might stop by, so spirits were high as the students waited to see if he might. (He did.)

Over 120 members of the press—print, radio, television, and internet—covered the event for both domestic and international publications. A high school senior covering the story for the student paper at the University of Chicago Laboratory Schools had a happy reunion with his former classmate, Malia Obama.

The event ran over by about 25 minutes, because the President couldn’t resist taking a few extra questions. On his way out of the Green Lounge, the President took the time to shake hands and talk with many of the eager student and faculty attendees.