

Nathaniel Smith III

General Counsel | Former Federal Prosecutor | Civic Leader

As General Counsel at Norfolk Southern, Nathaniel “Nate” Smith III operates where legal risk, business strategy, and public trust meet. Shaped by federal prosecution and legal leadership at Tesla, he brings a distinctive perspective to challenges that cannot be solved through legal analysis alone. He connects litigation and regulatory strategy with the commercial, governmental, and reputational realities facing the business - helping leaders navigate scrutiny, preserve credibility, and move the company forward.

Previously, Nate served as Associate General Counsel and Head of General Litigation at Tesla. Before joining Tesla, he was an Assistant U.S. Attorney in the Eastern District of Virginia, prosecuting national security and cybercrime cases, trying cases to verdict, and successfully arguing a digital-evidence issue of first impression before the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit. That experience informs his approach to emerging technology, government scrutiny, and public trust. He also practiced at Wachtell, Lipton, Rosen & Katz and Kirkland & Ellis and clerked for U.S. District Judge Catherine C. Eagles.

Nate earned his J.D. from Yale Law School and his B.A. in Political Science, magna cum laude and Phi Beta Kappa, from Howard University. He served as a visiting faculty member for Harvard Law School’s Trial Advocacy Workshop in 2019.

He is a Leadership Atlanta graduate and a principal member of the Georgia Statewide Human Trafficking Task Force. In 2026, the Atlanta Business Chronicle named him Outstanding General Counsel in the Large Legal Department category.

Based in Atlanta, Nate writes about the intersection of government and business through State & Enterprise.

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