

‘Good for You’: Judge Salutes Susman Godfrey’s Bet on a First-Year Associate in Big AI Copyright Case

By Ross Todd

May 12, 2026

U.S. District Judge Jon Tigar’s questions unexpectedly turned from copyright doctrine to a young lawyer’s professional biography during a Zoom hearing in a high-stakes artificial intelligence case last month.

“Did you graduate from the University of Chicago Law School in 2023?” Tigar asked **Dylan Salzman**, an associate in his first year at **Susman Godfrey**.

Salzman answered in the affirmative.

Tigar pressed on, asking about Salzman’s clerkships at the district court level and at the Seventh Circuit and when the young lawyer joined the Susman firm.

“Less than a year ago, true?” the judge asked.

“Correct,” Salzman said.

From there, Tigar delivered a message aimed as much at the bar as at the parties in front of him.

“And nonetheless, the firm thought it would be a good idea for you to argue in the federal



Courtesy photo

Dylan Salzman of Susman Godfrey.

court,” Tigar said. “And what I want to say to Susman Godfrey is: Good for you. Good for you, really.”

The comment came at the end of an hour-and-20-minute hearing in *Nazemian v. Nvidia Corp.*, one of the cases testing the boundaries of how copyright law applies to generative AI. For Salzman, who had split arguments on behalf of the author plaintiffs with Susman partner **Rohit Nath**, the questions about his personal background perhaps threw him

for more of a loop than any of the judge's queries during his arguments on indirect infringement issues.

"You don't expect to be in a normal human conversation with the judge in a public forum like that," Salzman told me when we connected by video last week. "So, it had my head spinning in ways that other questions did not, because you just don't expect it."

Salzman, who joined Susman Godfrey in Seattle in the fall of 2025, had argued a key portion of the plaintiffs' opposition to Nvidia's motion to dismiss. The hearing touched on a recent U.S. Supreme Court decision, *Cox Communications v. Sony Music Entertainment*, and on whether Nvidia could face contributory copyright liability for providing scripts that download massive datasets allegedly containing pirated books to train AI models.

To **Justin Nelson**, a veteran Susman Godfrey partner working with Nath and Salzman on the case, the associate's performance near the end of the hearing stood out even more than his command of the law.

"His answer at the very end of the hearing was so superb, and right on point; you just can't teach that," Nelson said. "It was really amazing to see in action. It was just pitch perfect."

That answer came after Judge Tigar recalled a story from early in his legal career—about being a young lawyer at **Morrison & Foerster** arguing against future Ninth Circuit Judge **M. Margaret McKeown** during an arbitration hearing. Tigar recalled that McKeown, then a partner at **Perkins Coie**, the opposing firm on the case, "wiped the floor with" him. The judge said the cross-examination he handled during the same proceeding went well "and it gave me

a kind of energy and hunger for trial work and the law that never left."

As Nelson put it, the moment posed an awkward challenge for his young associate: "How do you respond to that?"

Salzman's answer was both quick and generous.

"If Ms. McCracken ends up on the Ninth Circuit, I'll be telling the same story someday," Salzman told the judge, referring to **Rachael McCracken**, a **Quinn Emanuel Urquhart & Sullivan** partner arguing for Nvidia at the hearing.

"Well said," Tigar replied.

Nelson still sounded impressed recounting the episode when I caught up with him and Nath by video last week.

"I thought he did just such a great job in response to that of being polite, respectful, not just to the judge, of course, but to opposing counsel," Nelson said. "It was just really, really, really well done."

For Susman Godfrey, the hearing reflected a deliberate philosophy rather than a oneoff opportunity. Both Nelson and Nath, the Los Angeles partner who argued alongside Salzman, emphasized that giving junior lawyers real responsibility is firm custom, not exception. And Nath stressed that this was not some hearing that got put on the calendar by the judge to give an associate his "training wheels." This was one of the first of these AI copyright cases to really address the issues raised in the Cox case, if not *the* first, Nath said.

"He had the argument, and he just ... knocked it out of the park," Nath said of Salzman.

"This was really kind of our standard practice," Nath said. "If we have an argument, there are some arguments that the senior

lawyer handles. There's some big arguments that the junior lawyer will handle entirely on their own."

Nelson traced that approach back to the firm's founder.

"It stems from, really, **Steve Susman** himself, who taught me and others at the firm the importance of giving younger lawyers the opportunity to really, really excel," Nelson said.

Still, sending a firstyear associate into oral argument on cuttingedge copyright issues is not without risk. Nath said the preparation was intense and collaborative.

"We spent some time the day before with me kind of walking and talking Dylan through issues, and we did a little bit of a moot for him. We did a moot for me," he said.

Even so, Nath said, "honestly, he's a superstar."

"If I hadn't been there to get to get him ready, I think he would have done fantastically, because he's a great lawyer."

Salzman credited both his clerkship experience and the firm's trust in him.

"My boss on the Seventh Circuit was very enthusiastic about the merits of oral preparation," said Salzman, who clerked for Judge David Hamilton on the federal appellate court before joining the firm. "That experience prepared me really well for dialoguing about issues with a federal judge."

"It taught me how to hold my ground on issues that I felt strongly about, and know when to admit what I'm wrong," Salzman said. "So, I think that experience, in particular, combined with just understanding how judges think about cases and [want] to balance equities, helped me prepare for this argument."

As for the moment when Judge Tigar pivoted from the law to his resume?

"I was obviously honored, and also a little embarrassed," Salzman said. "When the judge first starts asking those questions, you hope that it's going to end up being accompanied by praise, but it's not a guarantee."

It turned out to be praise—a kind Judge Tigar clearly enjoys doling out.

"Any time I have two good firms in front of me like this and I get an opportunity to make a pitch for putting the young lawyers up, I like to do it," the judge said.

For Salzman, the message landed.

"I'm really grateful to the firm," he said, "and also grateful to Judge Tigar for acknowledging that, which is not something that's common."

Here's one more thing Salzman can be grateful to Tigar for: Last week, the judge largely let the suit survive Nvidia's motion to dismiss, only knocking out the plaintiffs' vicarious infringement claims.

That potentially leaves the door open for more opportunities like this one.