

SoundAdvice

Advising Investors for 33+ years

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Stagflation

Definition: "Persistent high inflation combined with stagnant demand in a country's economy."

Stagflation is an investor's nightmare and a scenario dreaded by financial analysts and money managers alike. The overall impact is not favorable for most stocks or bonds.

In the maturing phase of a typical business cycle, a strong economy increases demand to production capacity, and then prices increase because demand is outstripping supply. Our current business cycle is different.

This time, we have "monetary" inflation, which occurs when extraordinary money supply growth is largely responsible for rising prices, rather than an overheated economy reaching production capacity. Monetary inflation increases GDP, but the measurement is distorted because it is boosted by higher prices. After adjusting for inflation, real GDP is not increasing. The economy is stagnant while inflation is high -- producing stagflation.

Since April 2020, at the beginning of its latest quantitative easing (QE) program, the Federal Reserve has pumped up M2 (a broad measure of the money supply) by 40.6 percent. To put this into context, M2 has averaged an annual growth rate of 6 percent since 1980, rarely increasing by low double-digit rates.

Stagflation undermines most stock prices because earnings suffer. Production costs rise and squeeze profit margins. We are starting to see this trend in recent earnings reports, especially in the large retail sectors -- Target, Walmart, Kohls, etc.

So, what do we do?

First, we must recognize that we cannot expect to simply ride the thundering bull market we have enjoyed



Gray Emerson Cardiff,
Editor Since 1988

Investment returns in prior years have been calculated independently by the Hulbert Financial Group and concur with ours. From 2000 through 2021, the *Sound Advice* model portfolio averaged a 9.5% annual return versus 5.7% from the S&P 500.

for more than a decade. We no longer have the tailwinds of historically low interest rates and massive injections of liquidity from the Fed's quantitative easing (QE) bond-buying spree. Also gone is persistently low inflation. It is risky investing landscape now.

The Sound Advice Indicators

The **Sound Advice Risk Indicator** (page 10), which compares the S&P 500 index to house prices, is substantially above 2.0, revealing that the risk in the stock market is still historically high for the sixth time in the last 100 years.

The **Sound Advice Diffusion Indexes** (page 11) reverted to a "Caution" signal in November 2021 when the Federal Reserve announced the end of its fourth quantitative easing (QE) program.

During "Caution" signals over the last 47 years, the S&P 500 has either crashed, meandered, or climbed

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moderately, recording an average decrease of 0.3 percent. This is in comparison to periods during “Aggressive” signals, when the S&P 500 climbed an average of 30.4 percent.

The Sound Advice Portfolio

All of the *Sound Advice* model portfolio recommendations are made with our current “Caution” mode in mind. Our portfolio is made up of selections that are most likely to prosper despite adverse market conditions or will directly benefit from inflation and rising interest rates.

These selections, as well as their dividend yields, and buy/hold/sell recommendations, are summarized in the table on page 9 and sorted by investment objective categories and then in alphabetical order. Our individual stock recommendations are special situations offering a compelling value proposition. We are also recommending liquid electronically traded funds (ETFs) and mutual funds investing in sectors that are bound to benefit in the months and years ahead from fundamental changes in geopolitical, medical, and economic landscapes.

A Downside Hedge

We employ a downside hedge as part of the portfolio because it dampens volatility, especially during adverse market conditions. The **ProShares Ultra-Short Russell 2000 (TWM)** short-sells the Russell 2000 index and is designed to produce two times the daily fluctuations of the Russell 2000 index. A decline of say, 1.0 percent in the Russell 2000 will cause TWM to increase by 2.0 percent. Conversely, an increase in the Russell 2000 will cause TWM to decline in the same fashion.

We are using this hedge because of the inherent weakness in the Russell 2000 stocks in comparison to the S&P 500 stocks. Many of the stocks in the Russell 2000 have negative earnings. During the first three quarters of 2021, the total earnings of the Russell 2000 stocks were negative. The total has since turned positive but is still low, which makes the overall trailing twelve-month (TTM) price/earnings (P/E) ratio very high, currently 51. This lofty P/E ratio makes the Russell 2000 index more vulnerable than the S&P 500, offering more downside profit potential.

Another reason the Russell 2000 is more vulnerable is because it is comprised of companies with small

capitalizations. Small cap stocks have a higher risk/reward profile. They perform better during good times and worse during adverse conditions. Small caps are more heavily adversely impacted by rising labor costs and inflation.

ETFs for Rising Bond Yields

Now that the QE program is over, the Federal Reserve must now arrest the inflationary spiral by raising interest rates aggressively from historic lows. It must also sell a large amount of the bonds it holds on its balance sheet from its massive QE purchases. Both of these actions will raise both short-term and long-term interest rates.

Short-term interest rates will continue to rise because the Federal Reserve will need to increase the Federal Funds rate substantially to quell inflation and restore its credibility. Stagflation may keep the yield curve flat as markets worry about the health of the US economy, but tightening the monetary policy is bound to push up long-term interest rates and bond yields along the way.

Until this year, the most significant force on the Treasury bond market has been the Federal Reserve's quantitative easing (QE) program. At the rate of \$80 billion per month, the Federal Reserve purchased more than one-half of all US Treasury securities issued. This buying doubled the Federal Reserve's balance sheet of Treasury bonds, which now needs to be cut in half to a more normal level.

The largest buyer has now become the largest potential seller of Treasury bonds. Yields have nowhere to go but up. The market has started to recognize this inevitability as evidenced by the rise in bond yields in 2022.

The three ETFs listed below are designed to benefit from rising long-term Treasury bond yields. They differ in the amount of leverage used. You can choose among them depending on your investment objectives and risk tolerance.

The **Direxion Daily 20 Plus Year Bear 3 Shares (TMV)** uses 3:1 leverage.

The **Proshares UltraShort Lehman 20 Plus Year Treasury (TBT)** uses 2:1 leverage.

The **Proshares Short 20 Plus Year Treasury (TBF)** uses no leverage.

Historical Real Rates of Return

Years	30 Yr Note (Avg. Yield)	CPI Annual Increase	Real Rate
1980 - 2000	8.6	4.3	4.3
2000-04	5.7	2.6	3.1
2005-09	4.5	2.6	1.9
2010-14	3.6	2.0	1.6
2015-18	2.9	1.9	0.9
2019-21	2.1	3.2	(1.1)
Average			2.8

The price action of these ETFs is based on the daily changes in long-term Treasury bond indexes, only in the opposite direction, and then multiplied by the leverage each ETF uses. For example, a decline of say, 1.0 percent in their respective benchmark bond indexes will cause TMV to increase by 3.0 percent, TBT by 2.0 percent, and TBF by 1.0 percent.

These ETFs are in our portfolio because bond yields belong a great deal higher, especially with persistent inflation which is forcing the Federal Reserve to reverse its monetary policy.

The question is not whether bond yields will continue rising in the months ahead, but how much will they rise?

We can look back at history to find the answer. Bond investors have traditionally demanded a positive real return, which means over and above the inflation rate. The table below shows that since 1980, long-term Treasury bonds have yielded 2.8 percent above the inflation rate. Real yields were lower during the Federal Reserve’s four quantitative easing (QE) programs, which began in 2008, but QE programs are over now. (Before the QE programs, the average real return was 3.7 percent.)

The Fed’s definition of acceptable inflation is 2.5 percent. Even if inflation simmers down to the vicinity of 2.5 percent, which is unlikely in the foreseeable future, the yield on long-term treasury bonds should be in the vicinity of at least 5.3 percent, not close to 3 percent as it is today. Of course, if inflation remains stubbornly higher, bond yields will be commensurately higher.

So far this year, TMV is up 83 percent, TBT is up 52 percent, and TBT is up 22 percent. Although these ETFs have risen with the rise in bond yields this year, there is still considerable upside.

The Erosion Factor

ETFs based on daily changes have an erosion factor because they decline slightly faster than they increase with an equivalent change in the underlying index. This factor becomes greater as the leverage of the ETF increases. To gauge this factor, we assume that Treasury bond yields simply tread water, rising and falling by a significant amount, say, 0.03 percentage points (3 basis points) every day, and thus go nowhere. By the end of 2023, TMV would decline by 9.0 percent, TBT by 5.4 percent, and TBF by 2.4 percent.

The Upside Potential

The table below shows the approximate upside potential of our selected ETFs at the end of 2023 at various levels of long-term Treasury bond yields. The first row shows today’s ETF prices at today’s long-term Treasury bond yields. Note that the approximate price of these ETFs would rise dramatically as Treasury bond yields rise. The erosion factors discussed above are included in each of these approximate projected ETF prices.

ETF Upside Potential

Date	20-Year Bond Yields	ETF Prices		
		TBF	TBT	TMV
5/31/2022	3.26	19.86	25.65	99.69
12/31/2023	3.50	19.78	25.24	96.20
12/31/2023	4.00	21.02	28.35	113.62
12/31/2023	4.50	22.16	31.22	129.72
12/31/2023	5.00	23.23	33.87	144.61
12/31/2023	5.50	24.21	36.33	158.39
12/31/2023	6.00	25.11	40.79	171.14

Special Situations

These are stocks of individual companies that are presenting extraordinary values within their respective industries. Here they are in alphabetical order:

Apple (AAPL) was added to the portfolio in 2016 at \$29.08 per share (adjusted for the 4:1 split in 2020). We have been recommending holding off on adding to positions and continuing to hold. Although the price has been coming down, it is too high. High P/E ratios anticipate high growth rates which is a disaster waiting to happen. For example, at the end of May, the company said it will not increase the production of its iPhones this year over 220 million, the same as last year. That lack of growth was disappointing, and the stock dropped substantially that day.

Our buying target is still \$125 per share. At that price, the TTM P/E would be close to 20, which is still higher than we like to bet on, but it is much more reasonable than the current ratio.

Cisco Systems (CSCO) declined sharply the day in May when the company reported that the China lockdown has been interfering with supply chains and its earnings would be impacted. This is a temporary condition, and we view the dip in the stock price as a buying opportunity.

Cisco is transitioning from a network equipment seller into a contractual subscription and services company that generates recurring revenues from the equipment it sells, leading to a more reliable income stream. During the past five years, CSCO's annual recurring subscription revenues and services have more than doubled and now represents close to one-half of total revenues.

Cisco has a strong balance sheet which has been improving in recent years as assets have grown faster than liabilities. The company is flush with cash, even after making 5 synergistic acquisitions in 2021. The company is in an acquisition mode to boost growth.

CSCO will be a direct beneficiary of the major new upgrade cycle into the fifth generation (5G), which is able to download data 100 times faster than the previous generation of 4G, because demand will be accelerating for faster equipment.

Cisco also has a substantial and growing Cyber Security division. If there was ever an inexorable growth market, cyber security is it.

Crown and Castle International (CCI) will also benefit from the bright future of the (5G) of wireless technology because 5G requires a higher density of large and small cell sites and related infrastructure throughout the US.

At the May 23 Annual Global Technology Media and Communications Conference, management said that the company has received more orders than it had in any other period during the last 15 months, including 50,000 of them from AT&T, Verizon and T-Mobile.

CCI presents a relatively low risk way of investing in this high-tech area because of its ownership of hard assets comprised of more than 40,000 cell towers and approximately 50,000 active small cell nodes on buildings with 60,000 committed or under construction. The company also has 80,000 route miles of fiber cable concentrated in the top US markets.

These assets are difficult to create because of scarce locations in urban areas, zoning and governmental regulations, and sheer cost. As a result, there are high barriers to entry for competitors. Furthermore, income is secure, and growth is assured because these assets are leased to credit-worthy tenants with pre-determined escalating rent clauses. The company emphasizes sharing its growth with its stockholders. The dividend has been increased every year since 2014 at an average rate of 9 percent. The 2021 dividend was increased by 11 percent.

Intel (INTC) was still being impacted in May because of Covid-related lockdowns in China, where a significant supply of semiconductors is still produced. CEO Gelsinger urged Congress to pass the CHIPS Act, which is aimed at incentivizing the development of chip-building foundries in America. The conference committee has been selected for reconciling the House and Senate versions, both of which include \$52 billion in appropriations for semiconductor manufacturers for new chip foundry developments inside the US.

Influencing the reconciliation will likely be the stalled Facilitating American-Built Semiconductors (FABS) Act, which proposed tax benefits, including a 25 percent tax credit, full deductions for R&D expenses, and removing limits on interest expenses. These proposals have strong bi-partisan support and from those who will likely be included in the reconciliation conference.

Intel has the size, diversity, industry dominance, and financial health to make a relatively safe investment in a high-growth, and often high-risk business. Intel can leverage new technology into its existing large platform without introducing unacceptable risks.

JP Morgan Chase (JPM) showed some renewed life in May when the company commented that revenue was improving from interest income and investment banking, as well as improvements in credit quality.

Short-term interest rates have been increasing faster than long-term interest rates which has been problematic because banks benefit from larger profit margins when the spread widens between short-term interest rates (paid on deposits) and long-term interest rates (income received on mortgages). As we discuss elsewhere, long-term interest rates are absurdly low and cannot remain so indefinitely. JPM is down substantially since the first of the year, which makes it a good value for the stock of what is considered the world's highest quality banking enterprise.

NCR Corp (NCR) makes automatic tellers (ATMs), retail point-of-sale (POS) workstations, self-service kiosks, and other self-service checkout systems. The company is transforming from purely a hardware provider into a software platform and payments company. As a result, NCR is receiving recurring revenue streams with better growth potential.

Valero Energy (VLO) has climbed a stunning 72 percent this year. Oil prices have climbed, which would normally squeeze the "crack spread" profit margin of turning oil into refined products. However, the rise in gasoline, diesel, and jet fuel has more than compensated.

Dramatic reductions in refining capacity, especially in the Northeast where years of refining shutdowns have reduced capacity by 50 percent, have widened the crack spread and profits for existing refiners. Inventories of diesel and jet fuel in the Northeast are close to hitting all-time lows, prompting bidding wars against Europeans for diesel and gasoline supplies.

Additionally, the Colonial pipeline, the oil product pipeline connecting the Gulf to the Northeast and serving the remaining refining capacity, stopped receiving its normal apportionments in late May as more exports were allocated to Europe.

Environmental policy-driven mandates have led to substantial closures of refining facilities in the US and Europe. Shell, for example, reduced its refineries from

54 to 8 by 2021, and has scheduled 3 more closures by 2025. Many other companies have responded to government incentives to convert large oil refineries to small bio-fuel refineries. This has removed overall refining capacity dramatically, leaving China as the world's largest refiner.

The impact on fuel prices has been undermined by pandemic-related demand weakness but demand is now reaching pre-pandemic levels, so refining shortages are here for the foreseeable future.

Valero is our selection as the best refiner because it has the unique flexibility to refine substantial quantities of a variety of crude oil types. The company also has access to the US pipeline network for delivery to its gulf coast locations. This flexibility and access allow Valero to capture the highest margins among its competitors because it can take advantage of the temporary gluts of crude, whether it's low or high-quality crude, or light sweet (low sulfur) or heavy sour (high sulfur) and receive the best discounts for its feedstocks.

For the longer term, Valero is diversifying from a pure oil refiner to a "green" company through its joint venture with Diamond Green Diesel, which is producing renewable diesel at large profit margins. Renewable diesel is made from animal or plant waste material which reduces greenhouse gas emissions up to 80 percent because it only releases as much carbon dioxide as the material originally contained. It does not gel at low temperatures which means it can be easily transported through pipelines.

Cash flow, from diesel production turned positive in 2016 and is increasing. Renewable diesel volumes are expected to quadruple production capacity by 2023, from 290 million gallons per day to 1.2 billion gallons per day. Use for sustainable aviation fuel is expected to be a primary escalating demand factor. With diesel prices escalating along with other refined products, this has become a more significant growth aspect for VLO.

Management maintained the dividend throughout the pandemic and is expected to continue to do so, which provides an attractive yield.

Medically Related Selections

Moderna (MRNA) announced in May that it is currently investigating potential monkeypox vaccines at a pre-clinical stage. In late May, five more countries reported monkeypox infections which brought the total to 17.

The monkeypox project brings the number of pro-

grams in Moderna's pipeline to 46, with 34 vaccines in development. In addition to Covid and seasonal respiratory vaccines, Moderna is developing vaccines for latent viruses, including Ebola and other more prevalent latent viruses. Another vaccine for HIV is about to begin trials. Other potential vaccines already in clinical trials are for the Epstein-Barr virus (EBV) and for the *Cytomegalovirus* (CMV) which is currently in final phase III trials and furthest along in the approval process. CMV is the leading cause of birth defects in the US. News of approval would be very positive for MRNA because revenues would likely be in the range of \$2 to \$5 billion annually, and it would be a bridge to new horizons from Moderna's Covid-19 vaccines.

Moderna is also working on therapeutics using mRNA technology for oncology and cardio applications, along with treatments for autoimmune diseases. Collaborating with other companies on these fronts is a priority, as evidenced by recent joint ventures with Metagenomi and Carisma Therapeutics. Metagenomi and Moderna are collaborating to develop solutions against genetic diseases using gene-editing enzymes. Carisma Therapeutics and Moderna are collaborating to use Moderna's mRNA technology to develop solutions against solid tumor cancers, which kill 80 percent of all cancer victims.

MRNA has crashed from \$495 per share in September 2021. Behind the deflation was the consensus that revenue from Moderna's revolutionary and highly effective messenger RNA (mRNA) Covid-19 vaccine, called Spikevax, would be declining in the years ahead. This expectation is already reflected in the current price of the stock, evidenced by the absurdly low price/earnings (P/E) ratio. Even if a substantial earnings drop were to occur, of say 50 percent to \$14 per share, the P/E ratio would still be 10 with MRNA at \$140. A P/E of 10 is still a very modest P/E. Therefore, the downside risk in MRNA is limited even under such a draconian scenario because it is already anticipated in the price of the stock.

If a substantial earnings decline does not happen, MRNA should rise profoundly because the P/E will expand. For example, even a modest P/E of 10 on last year's earnings would push MRNA back up above \$280 per share, nearly double the current price.

Moderna's priority is investing its war chest of \$15 billion in cash to expand its manufacturing and commercial infrastructures in Canada, Australia, Africa, as well as four new subsidiaries to scale up delivery of mRNA vaccines and therapeutics in Malaysia, Taiwan, Singapore, and Hong Kong.

Boston Scientific (BSX) is well-suited for an aging population. This company has been a global medical technology leader for three decades by providing a range of high-performance solutions aimed at addressing medical needs and reducing healthcare costs in a wide range of critical areas, including cardiac rhythm and intervention, oncology, urology, and neuromodulation. The company's stream of new inventions acquisitions continues to add to promising growth prospects.

Stryker (SYK) is also well-suited for an aging population. This company has a diverse array of innovative medical technologies, including reconstructive, medical and surgical, as well as neuro-technological and spine products. Its orthopaedic devices for artificial knees and hips lead the industry. With 28 consecutive years of dividend growth, SYK has a very high return on equity which is propelled by organic sales growth and its strong balance sheet, giving the company the ability to continue to make strategic and synergistic acquisitions.

The Best in Biotech ETFs

Biotech companies offer the most explosive profits because they are the source of the world's top breakthrough vaccines and treatments. Their stocks are often volatile, making diversification essential. This can be accomplished by investing in a diversified electronically traded fund (ETF) investing exclusively in a portfolio of biotech companies. We are recommending three top performers. All have pulled back substantially, offering timely buying opportunities.

ARK Genomic Revolution Multi-Sector (ARKG) is an actively managed biotech ETF investing in companies expected to benefit by incorporating technological and scientific developments and advancements stemming from mapping the human genome. Breakthroughs and advancements have cut the cost substantially of mapping the human genome which is opening new opportunities and putting this sector on the cutting edge of many new innovations.

Virtus LifeSci Biotech Products (BBP) is a passively managed biotech ETF that weighs the portfolio selections essentially equally, as opposed to the more typical practice of weighing selections according to market capitalization. This is an important aspect because biotech ETFs who weigh their portfolio selections essentially equally have been the best performers by far because they have larger investments in smaller biotechnology companies which are acquisition targets for large pharmaceutical companies looking for ways to revitalize their drug portfolios by scooping up smaller companies.

Real Estate

Our three cumulative preferred stocks provide very attractive high yields and are inherently safe because any unpaid dividends must be retroactively restored first before any common dividends can be paid. In addition, these preferred stocks have a “liquidation preference” which must be paid out in full in the event of a liquidation of the company before any proceeds are paid to common stockholders. In all three cases, there is substantial equity in the common stocks of all three companies, evidencing that the market does not expect liquidation to be plausible.

These preferred stocks are trading below the company’s call price (the right of the company to purchase the preferred at a certain “call” price), or have no call feature at all, which is very unusual for preferred stocks. These preferred stocks have a small number of outstanding shares, which is typical for preferred stocks in general. Accordingly, we recommend using limit orders rather than market orders.

Hersha’s Preferred D (HTPRD) was recommended when the stock price was under \$4.00 a share as the pandemic was gaining momentum in early 2020 and the company suspended all dividends to preserve liquidity. We believed that the eventual resumption and payment of preferred dividends would propel this stock back close to its call price and liquidation preference value of \$25. In March 2021, the company announced that it was resuming the dividends on its preferred stocks and making up for unpaid preferred dividends. That happened on the Preferred D in April at the annual rate of \$1.64 per share. At the end of April, Hersha contracted to sell seven of its non-core properties outside of New York for \$505 million. Net proceeds are to be used for a significant net debt reduction of \$460 million, which will allow Hersha to recast its existing credit facility and eliminate all corporate-level debt maturities through 2024.

CEO Mr. Jay H. Shah commented, “With the sale of these non-core properties, we are able to continue our transformation by deepening our focus on our luxury & lifestyle and New York portfolios. Our resort markets and lifestyle properties continue to outperform...”

The price of this preferred is below its call price of \$25, and we recommend accumulating shares as long as that is the case.

RLJ’s \$1.95 Series A Cumulative Convertible Preferred (RLJPRA) is the only RLJ preferred stock and the dividend in 2019 amounted to less than 7 percent

of the company’s pre-covid funds from operations (FFO).

RLJPRA is convertible into 0.2806 common shares in RLJ. This sets the conversion price at \$89.09 per common share. RLJ cannot force conversion unless their common shares are trading at 130% of the conversion price, or at a price of \$115.82. This means that the preferred is essentially not callable without an astronomical rise in the price of the common stock (RLJ).

Strong operating results provided positive corporate cash flow for the 2021 full-year. The company ended 2021 with approximately \$665 million of unrestricted cash and \$2.4 billion of debt with no maturities until 2023. There was no debt encumbering 82 of the company’s 97 hotels.

This is an opportunity to lock in a safe extraordinary current yield. It is hard to imagine that this yield will remain this high indefinitely, which means the price of this preferred stock will rise significantly.

RPT Realty 7.25% Series D Cumulative Convertible Perpetual Preferred (RTPRD) is simply not callable by the company. This means that we can lock in a very high yield for as long as we desire. It pays an annual dividend of \$3.62. This is the only RPT preferred stock for RPT Realty. This is a convertible preferred stock, convertible into 3.47 shares of the common stock (RPT) at the holder’s option.

RPT Realty is a real estate investment trust (REIT) that owns 49 shopping centers across the eastern US, consisting of urban-infill neighborhoods, and power center properties with national chain store tenants, market-leading supermarket tenants, as well as a strong lineup of smaller national retailers.

In 2020, the company maintained the dividend on its preferred stock but suspended the dividend on its common stock. The dividend on the common stock was resumed for the first quarter of 2021 and increased in the fourth quarter. That means the preferred dividend is more secure because common dividends cannot be paid without paying the preferred dividend.

Third Avenue Real Estate Value Investor Fund (TVRVX) declared a distribution of \$2.40 per share at the end of 2021. This mutual fund has an advantage over other mutual funds during recessions. Unlike the typical REIT, management will go to cash when asset prices are generally high. Cash is preserved for scooping up opportunities. It is a global real estate fund which means it is not confined to US real estate with low cap rates which translate to high valuations.

Management looks for growth more than current income by focusing on real estate operating companies which, unlike REITs, can reinvest profits back into the business. Management also searches for opportunities in different aspects of a real estate company's capital structure by investing in senior debt in addition to equity.

Management is very price conscious, especially in relation to net asset value. Just as we do at *Sound Advice*, they eat their own cooking – they invest their personal assets into their funds.

US Infrastructure

The bi-partisan infrastructure bill enacted in November 2021 will benefit both PSCI and RTM during the next 10 years.

Invesco S&P SmallCap Industrials ETF (ticker symbol PSCI) is based on the S&P SmallCap 600 Capped Industrials Index which is designed to measure the overall performance of the securities of US industrial companies with small capitalizations (caps). These domestic companies are engaged in the business of providing industrial products and services, including engineering, heavy machinery, construction, electrical equipment, aerospace and defense, as well as general manufacturing. They will reflect the positive impacts more strongly than larger companies from an increase in infrastructure spending. Small cap construction companies are also typically domestic companies operating inside the US. It is likely that a government-sponsored program will stipulate that US companies are to be employed to perform the services. Even absent such stipulations, construction projects tend to employ local companies as subcontractors even when general contractors are national companies.

The portfolio is more diversified than the typical peer in the category. Management has maintained an emphasis on stocks with low financial leverage and strong returns on equity. This ETF rebalances its investments quarterly to maintain an equal weighting in its holdings. This strategy tends to improve and maintain diversification as well as deliver a stronger longer-term performance.

Basic Materials

Invesco S&P 500 Equal Weight Materials ETF (RTM) invests in the common stocks that comprise the S&P 500 Equal Weight Materials Index. All 29 sections are prime examples of basic materials companies outside of the oil and gas industries. Basic materials companies are particularly sensitive to economic changes. They thrive when the economy strengthens and are bound to benefit substantially in the months and years ahead as economic activity increases along with increased infrastructure spending. Basic materials are also classic inflation hedges. Prices are typically pushed upward by increasing inflation, benefiting the entire sector.

This ETF rebalances holdings quarterly to equalize their values. Calendar rebalancing ensures a greater degree of evenly weighted diversification which adds stability and safety to a portfolio. This practice often provides a superior performance because it offers exposure to many stocks that are under-weighted in most other portfolios and are therefore targets for new capital.

Consumer Staples

Invesco S&P 500 Equal Weight Consumer Staples ETF (RHS) is unique because it invests equal amounts in a collection of 33 consumer staple stocks within the S&P 500 index.

Consumer staples are those unexciting products we use every day without much thought, ranging from food, beverages (including alcohol), household goods (including cleaning supplies), hygiene products, and tobacco. These are products that people are unable (or unwilling) to remove from their budgets regardless of their financial situation. The nature of these products makes this sector defensive and much less vulnerable to recessions and bear markets.

RHS rebalances the investments at the beginning of each calendar quarter, which has given RHS a superior performance over other consumer staples funds because it has given investors exposure to many consumer staple stocks that are under-weighted in most other portfolios, making those stocks targets for new capital.

Portfolio Summary Table

This table is updated and live on our website:

www.soundadvice-newsletter.com

Income with Growth	Symbol	Price / NAV	Yield	Action	Limit
Hersha Hospitality Trust - Preferred D *	HTPRD	\$21.31	7.70%	BUY	\$25.00
RLJ Lodging Trust - Preferred A *	RLJPRA	\$26.93	7.24%	BUY	\$28.00
RPT Realty 7.25% Preferred D *	RPTPRD	\$55.42	6.54%	BUY	\$60.00
Valero	VLO	\$129.60	3.02%	BUY	\$136.08
Growth with Moderate Income					
Cisco Systems	CSCO	\$45.02	3.29%	BUY	\$47.27
Crown and Castle	CCI	\$189.65	3.10%	BUY	\$199.13
Intel	INTC	\$44.42	3.13%	BUY	\$46.64
Invesco Consumer Staples ETF	RHS	\$169.97	2.68%	BUY	\$178.47
JP Morgan Chase	JPM	\$132.23	3.03%	BUY	\$138.84
Growth					
Apple	AAPL	\$148.82	0.55%	HOLD	\$125.00
Boston Scientific	BSX	\$41.01	0.00%	BUY	\$43.06
Genomic Revolution Multi-Sector	ARKG	\$32.25	0.00%	BUY	\$33.86
Invesco Basic Materials ETF	RTM	\$184.51	1.48%	BUY	\$193.74
Invesco Small Cap Industrials ETF	PSCI	\$88.37	1.11%	BUY	\$92.79
Moderna	MRNA	\$145.14	0.00%	BUY	\$152.40
NCR Corp	NCR	\$34.69	0.00%	BUY	\$36.42
Stryker Corp	SYK	\$234.50	1.19%	BUY	\$246.23
Third Avenue Real Estate Value Investor *	TVRVX	\$23.63	0.00%	BUY	\$26.00
Virtus LifeSci Biotech Products	BBP	\$38.64	0.00%	BUY	\$40.58
ETFs for Rising Bond Yields					
Direxion Daily 20+Treasury Bear Shares 3X Leverage	TMV	\$99.69	0.00%	BUY	\$104.67
Proshares Short 20+Treasury - 2X Leverage	TBT	\$25.65	0.00%	BUY	\$26.93
Proshares Short 20+Treasury - No Leverage	TBF	\$19.86	0.00%	BUY	\$20.85
Hedges					
ProShares UltraShort Russell 2000	TWM	\$16.74	0.00%	BUY	\$17.58

Notes to the table: The right hand column is the highest recommended price limit for purchases.

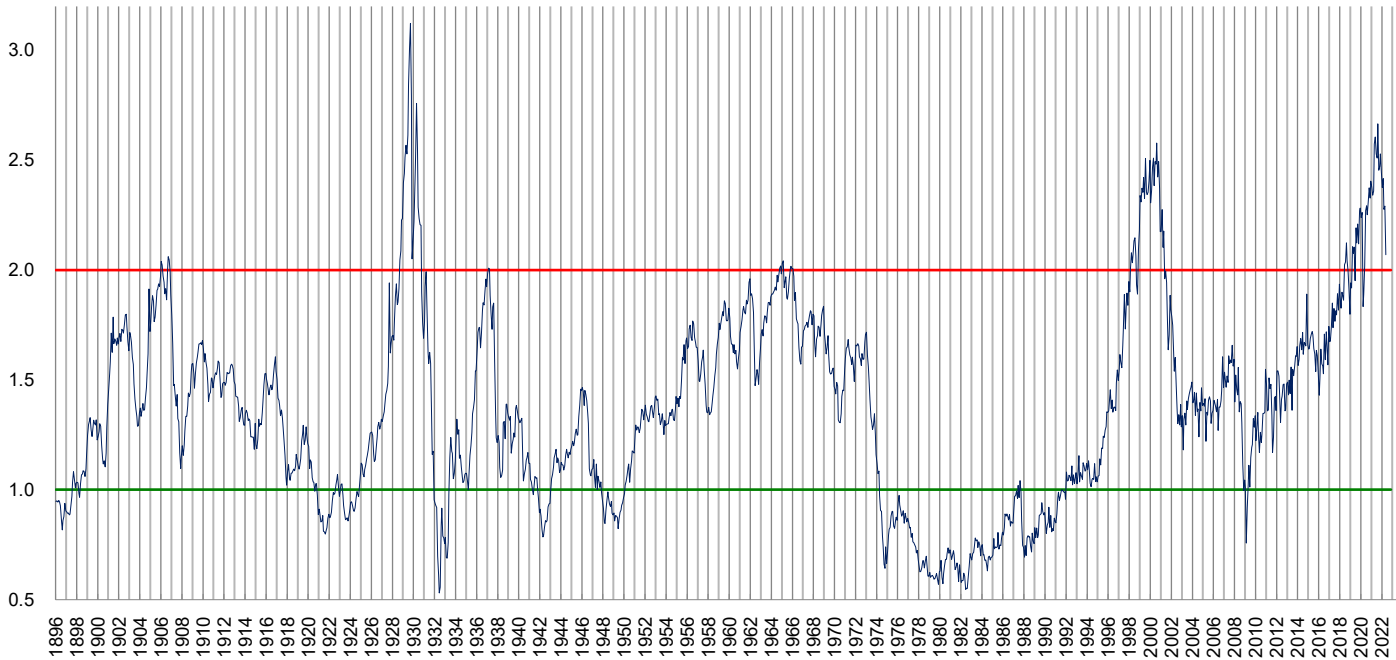
* It is not possible to offer live pricing.

General Comments: Our statistics are based on the assumption that \$10,000 is invested in each position. When a new position is added, we assume the same \$10,000 amount is invested in the new recommendation. When we recommend adding to a particular position, as we have done over the years, we assume another \$10,000 is invested again in that position.

If you are picking and choosing, you can focus on the sector of the portfolio that matches your investment objectives. Alternatively, you may have a higher degree of comfort with certain industries, funds, or stocks because of past experience or your profession. In that case, you may want to invest more heavily in one sector, or in one or more individual recommendations.

As always, broad diversification will temper volatility, add to safety, and improve long-term performance.

Capital Competition: Real Estate versus Stocks: The SoundAdvice Risk Indicator



There are few forces that are more important to a market's destiny than the amount of capital that is available to it. In a normal situation, capital will flow easily between markets as their underlying conditions change. But if a market becomes dangerously superheated, it will absorb a larger proportion of available investment capital than economic conditions and market demand can justify. This change will be reflected not only in the rising market's prices but also in the prices of competing markets, which will be lower than their underlying fundamentals would indicate they should be. Over the last 120+ years, we can see this titanic struggle between the stock market and its foremost competitor for investment dollars: real estate.

To reveal this phenomenon, we have set up an equation based on the ratio of the S&P 500 Stock Index to median price of new houses for each month over the last 100+ years. This equation exhibits an elegant financial minuet as each market has taken turns outperforming the other.

As we look at the historical data, we find that there is a range in which the price disparities are so strong that they are too great to be accounted for by the fundamental economic conditions underlying each market. Every time prices get into these danger zones it has meant that the prices in one market or the other have gone too high, and that they are in imminent danger of falling.

We label this new tool the **Sound Advice** "Risk Indicator," since it will allow us to locate the point at which prices are so high when compared to competing markets that they have come loose from their moorings and are on the verge of declining or under performing the other market.

What is too high? When stock prices are very high relative

to house prices, the **Sound Advice** Risk Indicator will rise over the line marked 2.0, revealing a high-risk time for stocks. In contrast, when the indicator drops below the line marked 1.0, it means that it is a very low-risk time to buy stocks. Notice from the chart how the **Sound Advice** Risk Indicator has oscillated back and forth, revealing the ongoing struggle between Stocks and houses for investment capital. We have labeled these long vacillations Supercycles.

But though an investment beginning with \$25,000 in 1895 could have made money being in either stocks or housing, had an investor followed the signals of the **Sound Advice** Risk Indicator, he or she would have made \$685 million versus \$25.8 million by simply holding stocks through the ups and downs, or 26.5 times more money.

A brief walk through history shows just how reliable this indicator is. The first recorded time the Risk Indicator rose above 2.0 was in February 1906, after the eight-year-old Dow-Jones average doubled since 1903. The market peaked in September of 1906. A massive sell-off in October would later be labeled the Panic of 1907. Stock prices trended downward for 14 more years until the end of 1921 while, searing inflation after World War I boosted house prices 48 percent. The combination of falling stock prices and rising real estate prices forced the Risk Indicator to fall below 1.0 in 1920, just in time for the Roaring 20's when stock prices tripled. Then, in October 1928, the Risk Indicator rose above 2.0 again. On Tuesday, September 3, 1929, the Dow

The New York Times

"Cardiff's equation reveals an elegant financial minuet as each market takes turns outperforming the other."

peaked at 318.17. The October crash marked the beginning of a decline that lasted until July 8, 1932. Houses had declined only by 15 percent compared with the 85 percent loss in stocks. The relative superior performance of houses caused our Risk Indicator to fall below 1.0 at the beginning of 1932.

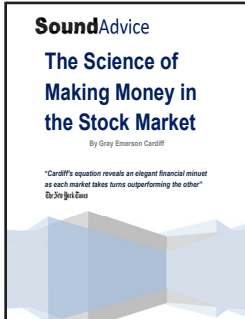
As America's GNP began posting positive gains and with 46 percent growth in three short years, stock prices would triple. Then the Risk Indicator crossed 2.0 in March 1937. This time, the signal came only one month after the zenith in stock prices. As stock prices retreated 50 percent, house prices remained relatively steady, causing the Risk Indicator to fall below 1.0 again in June 1941, within 9 months from the bottom.

As U.S. corporations expanded to meet growing demand, and the economy came to a rolling boil during the Eisenhower years, the stately rise would multiply stock prices by ten times until November 1964, when the Risk Indicator crossed over 2.0 again. The stock market would continue to climb into 1968, and then crashed into late 1974, wiping out the inflation-adjusted gains scored by investors since 1954.

However, a switch to an investment in houses would avoid all that and double in price by the time the next signal came for stocks in May 1974, as the Risk Indicator fell below 1.0 again, as the Dow careened below 700.

It would not be until March 1998 when the Risk Indicator would cross 2.0 again, after stocks were up by more than tenfold. The Dot-Com bubble would push stocks higher into early 2000, but then began another 50 percent retracement. A switch to houses would produce a 44 percent gain through the end of 2008 while stock prices were lower by 17 percent. In February 2009, with the Dow careening below 700 once again, the Risk Indicator quietly dropped below 1.0 to 0.77 as the S&P tumbled under 700. Since then, the stock market has delivered stunning gains as the S&P 500 has quadrupled. For the sixth time in the last 125 years, the Risk Indicator rose above 2.0 again in July 2018. The Risk Indicator has since remained above 2.0.

With the latest median house price at 435,000 in March (the latest data) and with the S&P 500 averaging 4,040 in May, the Sound Advice Risk Indicator reads 2.07, revealing the risk in stocks remains very high, for the sixth time during the last 100+ years.



SoundAdvice
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Business Cycles and Stocks: The SoundAdvice Diffusion Indexes

If the Supercycles identified by our Risk Indicator are the solemn, inexorable seasons that roll across the market's landscape, business cycles are the highly visible, sometimes serene but frequently blustery fronts and storms that we actually perceive as weather. The Risk Indicator has given us a reliable tool to determine the investment season in the stock market. This information is all-important; there will be no heat waves in January, no blizzards in July. But in our search for fair winds, we need to know more than the season. We also must be able to predict the shorter-term weather -- the bull and bear markets that fluctuate along the path of Supercycles.

The data we need is contained in the leading and lagging economic indicators. We have hand picked the most sensitive of these economic indicators to produce our "Diffusion Indexes" which function with amazing accuracy as predictors of the birth of cyclical bull and bear markets in stocks.

To construct our *Sound Advice* Diffusion Indexes, we observe changes in each of our selected indicators

over a five-month period, and take the percentage of those increasing.

When the *Sound Advice* Diffusion Index of LEADING Indicators drops to zero, it is time to buy stocks aggressively, regardless of how negative the atmosphere may be. This is not just an empirical coincidence. It is also logical. In order for all of the leading economic indicators to be giving off a zero value compared to five months before, it is nearly certain that the soft economy is providing an atmosphere for stable or declining interest rates.

This Diffusion Index gave us a zero reading in December 2008, close to the bottom, officially giving us an "Aggressive" signal. That signal came at a time when the Risk Indicator was below 1.0, which revealed that Supercycle 5 came to an end, and that Supercycle 6 was born.

The *Sound Advice* Diffusion Index of LAGGING Indicators gives "Caution" signals when all three of its individual lagging economic indicators rise above their respective levels of six months earlier, providing a 100 percent reading. This reading reveals that the US economy is strong enough to put upward pressures on interest rates.

Track Record of the SoundAdvice Diffusion Indexes

Drumming the last 47+years, after each “Aggressive” signal, the S&P 500 climbed an average of 30.4 percent. During “Caution” signals, the S&P 500 either crashed, meandered, or climbed, recording an average decrease of 0.3 percent.

Aggressive	S&P 500	Caution	S&P 500
Sep-74	68.12	Apr-76	101.9
Jul-76	104.20	Dec-76	104.7
Oct-78	100.58	Jun-79	101.7
Nov-79	100.00	Oct-83	167.7
Aug-84	164.48	Jun-85	188.9
Jul-86	240.18	Aug-87	329.4
Feb-88	258.13	Jun-88	270.7
Mar-89	280.00	Mar-93	449.7
Mar-95	493.15	Dec-98	1,141.0
Jun-00	1,429.40	Dec-00	1,320.3
Jun-03	974.50	May-05	1,191.5
Jun-06	1,276.66	Mar-08	1,325.4
Dec-08 (1)	865.58	Apr 10 (2)	1,197.3
Sep 10 (3)	1,122.08	Jun 12 (4)	1,359.8
Sep-12 (5)	1,437.82	Nov 14 (6)	2,044.6
Mar-15	2,079.99	May-15	2,111.9
Sep-17	2,492.84	Feb-18	2,705.2
Mar-20 (7)	2,761.98	Nov 21 (8)	4,667.4
Ave +/-	30.4%		-0.3%

Quantitative Easing (QE) Overriding Signals

- (1) QE-1 announced 4 months before Aggressive signal
- (2) QE-1 terminated into existing Caution signal
- (3) QE-2 announced but already in Aggressive mode
- (4) QE-2 terminated into existing Caution signal
- (5) QE-3 announced, changed to Aggressive mode
- (6) QE-3 terminated into existing Caution signal
- (7) QE-4 announced, changed to Aggressive mode
- (8) QE-4 terminated into existing Caution signal

A Powerful Overriding Force

Most of the time, the Diffusion Indexes are excellent detectors of the natural business cycle and a path to the science of making money in the stock market. However, the forces of the natural business cycle can be dominated by extraordinary changes in monetary policy during emergency situations.

The COVID-19 pandemic was the most recent example. In mid-March 2020, the Federal Reserve declared the institution of its fourth “Quantitative Easing” (QE) program whereby it dropped the Federal Funds rate to zero and commenced buying massive amounts of US Treasury bonds. With its mighty power, the Fed drove down interest rates and infused massive amounts of liquidity into the US economy. The money supply mushroomed.

At times like this, we need to ignore readings from the Diffusion Indexes. Interest rates are dropping by the Federal Reserve’s mandate, just as if the Diffusion Index of Leading Indicators had plunged to zero. Conversely, whenever the Federal Reserve declares an end to its QE program, we return to our Diffusion Indexes to follow their readings. If the Diffusion Index has moved to a “Caution” signal during the QE program, we should follow that reading. This is the most likely pattern of events because the economy will likely have strengthened in order for the Federal Reserve to end its QE program.

The impact of the Federal Reserve’s four QE programs on existing Diffusion Index signals are noted in the footnotes under the track record table.

Current Status

In November 2021, the Federal reserve announced the end of its latest QE program. Accordingly, the “Caution” signal given in October 2021 became effective. The latest data for April (reported in late May) caused a 67 percent reading. Our Caution signal is still in force

Our next “Aggressive” signal will come when the Diffusion Index of LEADING Indicators drops to zero. The latest reading was 100 percent.

Sound Advice versus the S&P 500

