

Is Inflation Dead?



The *Sound Advice* Portfolio is up 1.36 percent this year, as compared to 0.77 percent for the S&P 500. We have an average profit of 45.5 percent based on the prices at which each position was recommended.

-- Gray Emerson Cardiff, Editor

"It's tough to make predictions, especially about the future."

--Yogi Berra

When it comes to investing, it's all about the future, because that is what markets anticipate. Normally, this long into the expansionary phase of the business cycle, inflation would be heating up. To quote Yogi again: *"The future ain't what it used to be."*

Inflation has a powerful impact on interest rates, bond yields, currencies, as well as on the Federal Reserve's monetary policy, and consequently, on the general direction of stock prices.

In mid-March, it was reported that US consumer prices declined by 0.2 percent, after a flat reading for January. These readings, along with soft economies around the world, lead us to believe that inflation is dead. The economies of major countries around the world are soft with little or no inflation. Consequently, interest rates are low around the world. The US Treasury bond markets are no exception, with yields hovering near historic lows.

Even the Federal Reserve has lowered its expectations. As part of the regular meetings, each of the 17 FOMC members makes a prediction regarding the future path of interest rates. Those predictions are plotted in the so-called "Dot Plot", and medians are taken to formulate the Federal Reserve's official prediction.

At the FOMC's latest March meeting, the median Dot Plot for 2016 declined by 0.5 percentage points from its December meeting, predicting that the Federal funds rate would end the year at 0.875 percent.

On the surface, it looks like inflation is dead. But as Yogi would say, *"It ain't over until it's over."*

A deeper look reveals a bubbling caldron.

Core Inflation

The "core" inflation rate excludes the two most volatile sectors, food and energy, because they can mask inflation during certain periods. The US core inflation rate has averaged 3.7 percent annually from 1957 through 2015. As Yogi said, *"A nickel ain't worth a dime anymore."*

The core rate of inflation accelerated for the fourth consecutive month in February (the latest reading) by 0.3 percent, which matched January's increase. The last time the core inflation rate increased 0.3 percent for two months in a row was in early 2001.

The recent 3.6 percent annualized core inflation rate is in sharp contrast to the near zero reading for consumer price inflation. The primary culprit for the difference is energy. The list of consumer items measured for the consumer price index include energy, energy commodities, gasoline, fuel oil, and energy services. In February, gasoline prices at the pump plunged 13 percent, following two monthly declines of 4.8 percent, ending 20.7% lower than a year earlier.

Clearly, the recent plunge in energy prices has been masking an inflationary build-up revealed by the core inflation readings. When energy prices merely stop declining, the mask will be removed. When energy prices start increasing, upward pressure will be exerted on inflation.

That will be a game-changer. US interest rates and bond yields will rise to provide real returns (after inflation). Although inflation and interest rates may remain low elsewhere in the world, the higher US inflation rate will introduce

a difference. US interest rates and yields will be higher to compensate for the differences in the inflation rates between the US and other countries. Of course, this will not be good news for stocks.

Yogi also said, *“When you come to a fork in the road, take it.”*

The Energy Outlook

In last month’s feature, “Oil: The Big Picture”, we pointed out that the most significant change in recent years came from the US fracking boom which doubled production by adding nearly 5 million barrels a day to world supplies. To put the US increase from fracking into perspective, it was half of Saudi Arabia’s output.

US frackers produce a very light crude oil. What is not widely known or considered is that a substantial amount of it is so light that is not actually considered oil.

The industry uses specific gravity to measure how heavy or light petroleum is relative to water. The American Petroleum Institute (API) rebranded the measure for oil as API gravity. Lighter crudes have higher API gravities. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) is light crude, with an API gravity in the vicinity of 40. Anything above that, especially above 45 is considered “condensate.”

This distinction is important. The financial markets do not consider condensate to be oil. In fact, futures contracts to deliver crude oil forbid condensate to be included in the delivery. Moreover, crude oil price quotes specifically exclude condensate.

However, when the US Energy Information Administration (EIA) reports quantities of crude oil being produced and brimming in US storage tanks, the distinction is not made. What is actually being reported is crude plus condensate (C+C). Because condensate is included, these figures are over-stating the actual quantities of “honest-to-God” crude oil being produced and stored in the US.

There may not be much of a glut of honest-to-God oil. The US glut is 144 million barrels of crude plus condensate. With close to 250 million barrels of condensate coming from the Eagle Ford in 2015 alone, a substantial portion of the glut (if not all of it) is not actually oil, but condensate. In any case, lifting the US export ban opens new world-wide avenues for US crude and condensate, which should go a long way to alleviating the current imbalances.

We also concluded that at least part of the US oil glut was due to a refining problem. US refineries were not set up to process all of the light shale crude and condensate coming from frackers. With supplies outrunning refining capacities, storage tanks filled up and caused a glut.

Even using slow GDP growth assumptions, the EIA projects that consumption will still be on the rise, by 1.2 to

1.5 barrels per day (bbl/d) in 2016 and 2017. If monetary stimulus programs in Europe and elsewhere gain traction, these estimates may prove to be low.

We have already seen the peak in oil production from US frackers. As their production continues to decline, the world’s daily supply/demand balance will shift significantly. The largest excess supply of 2.3 million bbl/d in the second quarter of 2015 was only 2.4 percent of world production, a relatively thin margin. In the second half of 2016, the excess is projected to be less than one percent, with no excess by the second half of 2017.

Financial markets anticipate major events ahead of their actual occurrences. As soon as the markets get the first whiff of a decline in the oil glut, the implications go beyond the energy sector. The US inflationary outlook will change, along with the outlook for bonds and stocks in general.

Energy Selections

A recovery in oil and gas prices translated into stellar profits in past cycles. Yogi would say, *“It will be Deja Vu all over again.”* Here are our energy selections, in alphabetical order.

Chesapeake Energy (CHK) has taken a beating from the crash in oil and gas prices. CHK’s debt load makes it an aggressive investment in the current environment of low oil and gas prices, and the risks increase with an extended period of low energy prices. This is why CHK is near the top of the list of Wall Street’s most hated stocks.

In an early March email update, we noted a classic short squeeze in CHK. The stock nearly doubled in a week, with no new supporting news in the background. Short interest in the stock had risen above 40 percent of the entire stock float, as short sellers were borrowing stock from their brokerage firms and selling it, hoping to buy it back at a lower price, capturing a profit from the fall in the stock price.

When a short position reaches such epic proportions, it is actually bullish because it means there is massive potential buying power in the wings. Short-sellers are traders, which means they will soon be buying back stock to cover their short positions. During the first week of March, we saw a buying panic emerge among short-sellers which caused the stock price to nearly double.

The latest bi-monthly update provided by the stock exchanges shows that 204 million shares of CHK are shorted, which is 30.74 percent of the shares outstanding. While that is down from 40 percent a month ago, it is still a very high percentage. Only GameStop (GME) and Transocean (RIG) have higher short positions among large cap stocks. Accordingly, this is a bullish factor.

CHK has \$1.8 billion in debt payments coming due through 2018, but has a \$4 billion credit facility to tap. In addition, CHK has more asset sales planned, is slashing

spending, and renegotiating pipeline contracts.

Assuming the likelihood of Chesapeake surviving low energy prices, the upside from a recovery is substantial. Morningstar (<http://www.morningstar.com>) shows CHK's current fair market value valuation at \$12 per share – close to 3 times the current stock price.

Chevron (CVX) is a vertically integrated oil company which means it has operations in all phases, from exploring and drilling, to transporting and refining, and even to retail sales at its gas stations. Profits vary from these various stages of production, depending on price demand for oil and for refined products. High oil prices boost margins from drilling but squeeze margins from refining. When oil prices are low, profit margins expand from refining.

Although the company's recent earnings obviously do not cover the dividend, management has pronounced the annual dividend of \$4.28 per share as "sacrosanct."

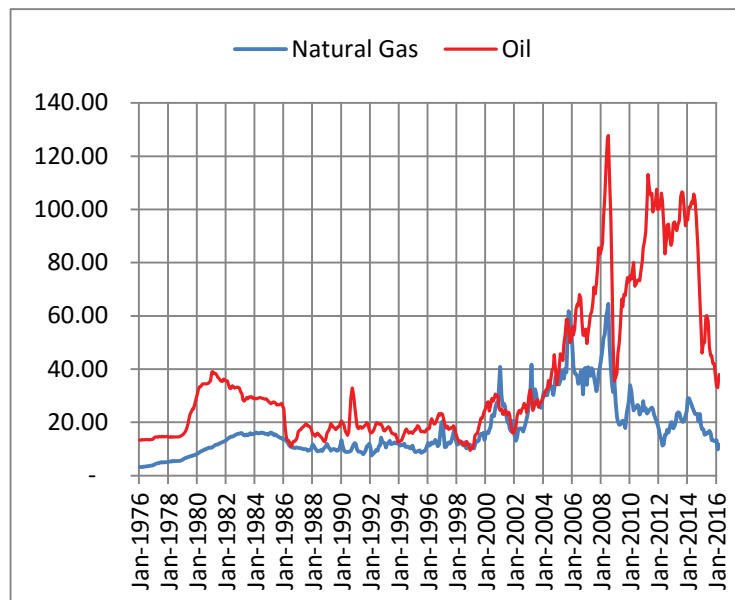
To combat low oil and gas prices (and retain the dividend) Chevron has been negotiating 20 to 50 percent cost reductions with its suppliers, which the company predicts will amount to \$1 billion in savings. The company is also reducing its contractors and employee count, amounting to another \$1.4 billion in savings. Chevron is also reducing actual drilling costs by 20 percent by increasing the number of wells per rig and cutting the number of drilling days.

Fidelity Select Natural Gas Fund (FSNGX) is a diversified way to participate in the recovery of the natural gas industry through strong companies. Natural gas provides the same energy as oil for pennies on the dollar, and natural gas is more environmentally friendly.

The drop in the price of oil brought the energy-equivalent costs of oil and natural gas closer, but a substantial disparity still exists. One barrel of oil provides approximately 5.8 million British Thermal Units (BTUs) of energy. At \$38 a barrel, that is the cost of 5.8 million BTUs. However, with the current market price for natural gas close to \$2.00 for one million BTUs, 5.8 million BTUs will cost \$11.60. So the same amount of energy is available for 31 cents on the dollar, if it is in the form of natural gas rather than oil.

The updated chart shows the historic relationship between the costs of these two forms of energy. The red line shows the price of a barrel of oil since the mid-1970s. The blue line shows the price of natural gas multiplied by

The Cost of Energy Equivalents of Oil and Natural Gas



5.8 to approximate the same amount of energy contained in a barrel of oil. Most of the time, the costs of the two forms of energy have been closely aligned. They have moved closer together, but remain substantially apart. This difference still translates into an expanding natural gas industry.

ICON Energy Fund Class S (ICENX) is also a diversified way to participate in the recovery with a basket of substantial companies. The hallmark of this fund has been its ability to look for changes within the energy sectors to capture value, rather than simply depending on rising oil prices. This fund is a good way to capture today's values and profit from the recovery and changing landscape on a diversified basis with professional management.

Transocean (RIG) makes deep-water drilling rigs and leases them to major oil producers around the world. RIG has been sharply impacted because the utilization of its rigs has fallen along with the drop in oil prices. RIG's metrics compare favorably to its peers, and we continue to recommend RIG because of its prospects for survival.

Deep water drilling is still a necessary source for the US and the world's oil needs, especially as US fracking drops off. Long-term profits from RIG should be stellar from here.

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As mentioned earlier, RIG is among Wall Street's most hated stocks. The latest bi-monthly update provided by the stock exchanges show that 131 million shares are short, which is 36.05 percent of the entire number of shares outstanding. Among the large caps, this short interest is only topped by GameStop (GME) with a 37.4 percent short interest. With short-sellers in the wings, with the requirement to inevitably buy back the shares borrowed from brokerage firms, this is a great deal of near-term buying potential, and a bullish factor.

Valero Energy (VLO) is the largest oil refiner in the US. It owns 15 refineries with a capacity for 2.9 million barrels per day. The company also has 7,400 retail outlets in the US, Canada, UK, and Ireland. Valero is one of the few energy companies that can benefit from lower oil prices because refining margins generally expand during such times. Valero's has the most flexible refineries, allowing the company to capture the highest margins among its competitors. Valero's refineries are also well positioned geographically, even for accessing the low-cost Maya crude from Mexico, heavy sour oil that Valero buys for an even larger discount than from glutted US oil.

In February, VLO retreated as a glut of gasoline hit the mid-west and forced cut backs in refining volumes. We viewed this as a temporary condition. Evidently the market agrees because VLO has been recovering.

Another perceived negative was lifting the US oil export ban which was seen as reducing the potential for discounts VLO captures on purchasing domestic crude oil. However, this is not likely to be a significant disruption. Valero recently acquired a 50% interest in a pipeline to connect from the regional oil storage hub in Cushing, OK, to its Memphis facility. This direct tap into tanks that are brimming with the glut of oil, is bound to preserve discounts and save on costs.

At less than ten times earnings, VLO is a great value, especially for a company with a strong balance sheet and solid growth potential. The quarterly dividend was recently increased again to \$0.60 a share, for a yield close to 3.7 percent.

Real Estate Selections

As in the case of bond yields, low interest rates for so many years have pushed down real estate capitalization (cap) rates (the yield before debt payments are considered) to historically low levels. As a result, commercial real estate prices are historically high, and the average real estate investment trust (REIT) does not present a particularly good value.

In the longer run, a rising economy will push up rental rates which will more than compensate for added interest expenses caused by rising mortgage interest rates. However, this benefit is most likely to translate into profits only on real estate stocks offering an extraordinary value now.

Hersha Hospitality (HT) is a real estate investment trust in the hospitality sector, which owns and operates high quality upscale hotels in urban gateway markets. The Company's 55 hotels totaling 8,654 rooms are located in New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Washington DC, Miami and select markets on the West Coast.

Growth of funds from operations (FFO) in 2015 was 18.7 percent. Strong growth should continue because most of HT's major properties have been undergoing renovations and not producing their full income potential. Income should continue rising from new acquisitions and completed renovations.

HT is selling at a discount to its hotel assets. Based on the latest fourth quarter financials, we value HT at \$27.09 per share which is nearly 30 percent higher than the current price. The dividend yield above 5 percent is attractive and lowers the risk profile.

In 2015, the Company repurchased 5.3 million common shares, representing 10.7% of common shares outstanding. The Company has \$72.0 million remaining on its \$100 million share repurchase program.

Retail Opportunities Investment Corp (ROIC) is a real estate investment trust (REIT) that specializes in the acquisition, ownership and management of grocery-anchored shopping centers located in densely-populated, metropolitan markets across the West Coast.

ROIC began as an IPO in October 2009, just after the REIT sector had been decimated by the 2008 melt-down. It started with a fresh slate in a real estate market replete with bargains. ROIC buys distressed retail properties with high-quality demographics, refurbishes them, and then leases them at a premium. As new properties are added, along with tenant upgrades, FFO is bound to continue rising.

In 2015, ROIC's FFO grew by 12.9 percent, with a 19 percent increase in the fourth quarter. The dividend was also increased by 5.9 percent. This attractive dividend lowers its risk profile.

Third Avenue Real Estate Value Investor Fund (TVRVX) is loaded with good values substantially below NAV with strong growth prospects.

Management has a similar approach to ours because it is very price conscious, especially in relation to net asset value, when making decisions on whether to buy, hold, or sell a particular company. The managers expend great effort analyzing financial statements, visiting companies and their properties, and assessing management teams in order to come up with their estimates of intrinsic value. Just as we do at *Sound Advice*, they eat their own cooking – they invest a substantial amount of their personal assets into their funds.

TVRVX has a number of distinguishing characteristics. This is a global real estate fund. 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. Also unlike the typical REIT, management will go to cash when asset prices are generally high. Cash is preserved for scooping up opportunities in distressed times.

Specifically, the management team looks for 4 fundamental characteristics before making investments:

- 1) The issuer has an especially strong financial position.
- 2) The common stock is selling at a price that reflects at least a 20% discount from Net Asset Value ("NAV").
- 3) There is comprehensive disclosure including reliable audited financial statements.
- 4) The prospects are that over the next three to seven years, NAV will be increasing by at least 10 percent annually (including dividends).

Medically-Related Selections

This sector is defensive because medical needs persist regardless of financial conditions. The world's demographic aging trends, and the commensurate increase in medical care needs, translate into strong growth prospects for this industry.

Boston Scientific (BSX) produces medical products well suited for an aging population. The company's mission is to transform lives through innovative medical solutions that improve the health of patients around the world. BSX 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. BSX has more than 900 US patents.

The latest innovation was announced in March, with the launch of the AXIOS Stent and Electrocautery Enhanced Delivery System to help physicians manage complications from pancreatitis using a minimally invasive endoscopic approach.

Pfizer (PFE) has an arsenal of new pharmaceutical products, with 88 in clinical development and 30 in late stage development or registration. PFE has rebuilt its pipeline and transformed its R&D approach. The company is well positioned with several break-through drugs and treatments.

Near the end of 2015, PFE and Botox maker Allergan agreed to merge, creating the world's biggest pharmaceutical company in terms of sales. Assuming the merger goes through, PFE would domicile in Ireland which will result in lower tax rates. Allergan stockholders will receive 11.3 PFE shares for each Allergan share. Pfizer claims that it makes all of its profits overseas,

and the corporate inversion will save \$2.2 billion in US taxes annually which will be a boost to earnings. Unless the U.S. Treasury department or Congress blocks this deal, which is unlikely, Pfizer will gain a rapidly growing portfolio of branded drugs in addition to tax benefits.

On March 30, Pfizer and Allergan said they have received a request for additional information from the US Federal Trade Commission with respect to their merger. The FTC's request was anticipated as part of the regulatory process and extends the waiting period required under antitrust rules to 30 days after the companies have provided the information.

Stryker (SYK) provides a diverse array of innovative medical technologies, including reconstructive, medical and surgical, as well as neuro-technological and spine products, although SYK is best known for its orthopedic devices for artificial knees and hips. Continued growth is assured by accelerating demand for joint replacements on aging US baby boomers. As life expectancies continue to increase (and obesity trends continue), more and more hip, knee, and spinal procedures will be needed.

Stryker's cash-rich balance sheet and strong cash flow give it avenues for continued diversified growth through acquisitions. The most significant recent acquisition was MAKO Surgical, which recently received FDA clearance for its knee and hip applications, enhancing SYK's robotic reconstructive solutions. Other recent acquisitions include Small Bone Innovations, Pivot Medical, Berchtold Holding, as well as Trauson Products, China's largest manufacturer of orthopedic implants.

Tekla Life Sciences Investors (formerly Hambrecht & Quist Life Sciences Fund - the symbol is still HQL) is in our portfolio because the most explosive profits in the entire healthcare industry can be found in biotech companies. Over the last 10 years, biotechnology has become a major industry which now provides the world's top drugs. This sector has outperformed the broad market during the last one, five, and ten year periods.

Biotech companies tend to be high risk and high reward investments which makes diversification essential. This fund is an excellent way to invest in this sector.

Small Caps

Numerous studies show that small caps perform better over the long run than the market as a whole. This is especially true during a recovering economy. Small-cap stocks perform better than large-cap stocks because they are pure plays on the early stages of new industries and inventions. They have more dynamic and entrepreneurial management, and they are much more likely to be the target of an acquisition or merger which is usually quite profitable. They also tend to be domestic companies without substantial overseas exposure, and therefore are not buffeted by the currency fluctuations that currently haunt larger companies. Here more than ever, attention to

value is paramount.

Third Avenue Small-Cap Value Investor Fund (TVSVX) invests in companies with small capitalizations using the same value-oriented approach as it does with its real estate value fund. TVSVX management scours the investment universe for companies that combine the three main features: creditworthiness, a meaningful discount to a conservatively estimated net asset value (NAV), and the ability to consistently grow NAV, with an initial targeted holding period of three to five years. A patient and price conscious acquisition is a critical first step in both protecting capital and in realizing an attractive investment return.

Special Situations

The rest of our portfolio falls into other market sectors, with companies that are presenting extraordinary values within their respective industries. Here they are in alphabetical order.

Agrium (AGU) is a Canadian company offering a broad mix of agricultural products, from wholesale fertilizers to retail farm products, aimed at increasing the efficiency of food production. AGU products will be in growing demand as arable land continues to disappear around the world while population and per-capita income increases. This translates into a need for greater crop output per acre through the use of AGU's products.

Close to one-half of AGU's earnings come from its retail stores offering farm products, and the other half comes from its wholesale sales of fertilizers, mostly nitrogen-based but also from potash and phosphates. This diversification protects AGU from swings in the markets and brings steady sources of growing free cash flow for future growth.

AGU is trading at close to 11 times the 2016 earnings estimate of \$8.00 per share. This is a good value with a growing dividend which was recently increased again to \$0.875 per quarter.

Alcoa Aluminum (AA) is a fully integrated aluminum producer, which means it operates in all phases of production, starting with its mining operations (upstream) and ending with its finished products (downstream). Alcoa's full integration gives it control over the supply chain, and makes it possible to enjoy larger profits from its downstream operations when aluminum prices are low.

In the first half of this year, Alcoa will be splitting its upstream and downstream operations into two separate companies. Management is making this move to unlock value, and we believe it is certain to do just that.

Disney (DIS) will be opening its new theme park in Shanghai on June 16, and the company announced in late March that tickets were sold out just hours after going on sale on its official website.

Star Wars: The Force Awakens, has grossed more than \$2 billion globally so far, not counting substantial amounts of merchandising revenue, which puts it just behind 2009's *Avatar*'s \$2.79 billion, the highest grossing movie in history.

Disney plans several more episodes and related offshoots of the *Star Wars* franchise into 2019, along with more *Indiana Jones* movies. More *Avengers* and *X-men* movies are also in the making for 2016.

The success of these movie franchises will add to investor enthusiasm and make DIS less dependent on its cable TV stations, especially ESPN, which are under pressure from cable platforms offering skinnier bundles with fewer required stations.

Ford (F) is in our model portfolio because it is an extraordinary value. Ford's new all-aluminum F-150 truck, which gets close to 30 miles to the gallon, has been Ford's best-selling vehicle in the US for 34 consecutive years, and the company's most profitable product.

On the cost side, Ford has been reducing the number of platforms it uses to produce its models, from 27 in 2007 to 9 by the end of 2016, which will continue to save billions through economies of scale and give Ford more agility to adapt to changes in demand. Ford became profitable last year in Europe for the first time since 2011.

Ford is expected to earn \$1.95 per share, which puts the stock price close to 6.8 times earnings, an incredible discount from the rest of market. The dividend is close to 5 percent which lowers the risk.

Freeport-McMoRan Copper & Gold (FCX) is the world's largest copper producer. It also has significant oil and gas assets which it acquired at the top of the market in 2013. This was particularly unfortunate because FCX took on a large amount of debt to make the acquisition. The added leverage, along with sinking prices on these commodities, has decimated FCX.

The crash in energy and copper prices has thrown FCX into hard times, especially with the company's debt load of \$20.4 billion, \$2.0 billion of which matures over the next 24 months. Management is focusing on selling assets to reduce debt, not only the oil and gas assets but also mining assets.

A return to profitability in 2016 appears plausible. Evidently activist investor Carl Icahn agrees. As we have reported previously, he has a stake of 88 million shares, which makes him its largest shareholder. Mr. Icahn usually has a plan in mind aimed at fixing the current problems, and coercing management into adapting his ideas. The board of directors has been restructured which was likely done to avoid a proxy fight with Icahn.

NCR Corp (NCR) makes automatic tellers (ATMs), retail point-of-sale (POS) workstations, self-service kiosks, and other self-service checkout systems. 485 million people

use NCR products every day, and there is room for substantial growth in the US and around the world.

Blackstone recently purchased \$820 million in convertible preferred stock that is perpetually convertible into NCR common stock at \$30 per share. Blackstone is a savvy private equity and advisory firm, with a successful track record. Blackstone evidently sees that it can accelerate NCR's transformation into a software-driven business, and add significant value to NCR above \$30.

We have noted that NCR is an undervalued stock, even at \$30. NCR expects 2016 earnings to be in the range of \$2.85-\$2.95, which puts the stock under 11 times earnings, far below the market average.

Symantec (SYMC) is the dominant supplier of software for computer security and protection against viruses and other nuisances through its leading flagship brand, Norton. Nearly all of the Fortune 500 companies are Symantec customers. If there ever was a more certain growth industry, protection from cyber espionage is it.

In January, Symantec sold its subsidiary Veritas to the Carlyle Group. The sale transforms Symantec into a pure-play security vendor with fresh capital for acquisitions and R&D to bolster growth. This new-found focus and capital should launch a new growth phase for SYMC.

SYMC received \$5.5 billion for Veritas which management is returning to shareholders. In March, SYMC paid a special dividend of \$4.00 per share (\$2.7 billion). The company also announced the next phase of its capital return program by launching a \$1.0 billion accelerated share repurchase transaction, the first in a series totaling \$2.3 billion between March 2016 and March 2017. This follows a share repurchase in January of \$500 million.

Tetra Tech (TTEK) is a leading company in water technologies and environmental remediation with a healthy balance sheet for growth in strategic markets. TTEK recently purchased Coffey International which is a good fit and should improve TTEK's growth in the next few years.

In March, TTEK announced the acquisition of INDUS Corporation, an information technology (IT) firm offering spatial and water information management capabilities to its US government customers. The acquisition will expand TTEK's key clients, to include the Environmental Protection Agency, and is a good fit with TTEK's water management expertise.

TTEK also announced in March it received another Navy contract to help meet compliance requirements regarding water conservation and waste minimization.

Xerox (XRX) is continuing to transform from a seller of printers and copiers to a company providing information technology (IT) services and document outsourcing (printing as a service). The services side now amounts to

55 percent of revenue. We have been emphasizing that XRX is very cheap relative to the rest of the market, and a good value.

Carl Icahn agrees, as evidenced by his recent purchase of 82 million XRX shares. To improve management efficiency and focus, Icahn is forcing the company to split into two separate companies, one with the printers and other equipment and the other offering the IT services. Mr. Icahn believes XRX is undervalued, and that share earnings will likely improve 10 to 15 percent in 2016 due to a major cost-efficiency program and a decline in the number of shares outstanding.

ETFs for Rising Interest Rates

We are recommending three ETFs designed to benefit from the normalization of interest rates and long term bond yields. As discussed previously, bond yields are bound to increase in the months and years ahead as energy prices recover, the US economy continues to strengthen, and inflation begins to heat up.

These ETFs differ in the amount of leverage used, and 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.

The price action of these ETFs is based on the changes in long-term treasury bonds, specifically BlackRock's iShares 20+ Year Treasury Bond ETF (symbol TLT) which holds a portfolio exclusively of long-term Treasury bonds. The prices of these ETFs fluctuate in accordance with the daily fluctuations of TLT, only in the opposite direction, multiplied by the leverage each uses. For example, a decline of say, 1.0 percent in TLT will cause TMV to increase by 3.0 percent, TBT by 2.0 percent, and TBF by 1.0 percent. Conversely, an increase in TLT will cause these ETFs to drop in the same fashion.

We can project the movements of these ETFs based on any given scenario. In its December meeting, the Federal Reserve's Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) unanimously decided to begin normalizing interest rates. The most recent Dot Plot was taken at the March meeting. Of particular interest in the details of the March Dot Plot is the sharp difference in the predictions among this group of informed FOMC experts. The lowest prediction was that the Federal funds rate would end 2016 at 0.625 percent. The highest was 2.125 percent.

Long-term Treasury bond yields generally move in accordance with changes in short-term rates because investors usually want a real rate of return (above the

inflation rate) in the proximity of 3 percent. As mentioned previously, inflation, (including food and energy), has been bouncing around zero. At this writing, long-term Treasury bond yields are 2.62 percent. With inflation at zero, this is the real return.

A reasonable forecast would use the median points of the March Dot Plot, which predicts that the Federal funds rate will be 0.875% by the end of 2016, 2.0625% by the end of 2017, and 3.00% by the end of 2018. Assuming long-term Treasury bond yields move in accordance with these target points (to preserve the same as today's real return), long-term Treasury bond yields would be yielding 3.495% by the end of 2016, 4.683% by the end of 2017 and 5.62% by the end of 2018. With inflation reaching the Federal Reserve's target of 2%, long-term Treasury bond yields would be yielding 1.495% over the inflation rate at the end of 2016 and 2.683% over the inflation rate at the end of 2017.

Here is what would happen to each ETF:

TMV would rise to \$34 by the end of 2016, to \$60 by the end of 2017, and to \$89 by the end of 2018.

TBT would rise to \$50 by the end of 2016, to \$74 by the end of 2017, and to \$96 by the end of 2018.

TBF would rise to \$26.4 by the end of 2016, to \$32 by the end of 2017, and to \$36.5 by the end of 2018.

A conservative forecast would use the lowest points of the March Dot Plot, which predicts that the Federal funds rate will be 0.625% by the end of 2016, 1.625% by the end of 2017, and 2.125% by the end of 2018. Assuming long-term Treasury bond yields move in accordance with these target points (to preserve the same as today's real return), long-term Treasury bond yields would be yielding 3.245% by the end of 2016, 4.245% by the end of 2017 and 4.745% by the end of 2018. With inflation reaching the Federal Reserve's target of 2%, long-term Treasury bond yields would be yielding 1.245% over the inflation rate at the end of 2016 and 2.245% over the inflation rate at the end of 2017. These are historically low real rates of return.

Here is what would happen to each ETF:

TMV would rise to \$30 by the end of 2016, to \$48 by the end of 2017, and to \$60 by the end of 2018.

TBT would rise to \$46 by the end of 2016, to \$64 by the end of 2017, and to \$74 by the end of 2018.

TBF would rise to \$25.3 by the end of 2016, to \$30 by the end of 2017, and to \$32 by the end of 2018.

The Erosion Factor

As we have pointed out in the past, these ETFs suffer from erosion because they decline slightly faster than they increase with an equivalent change in bond yields, particularly with higher leverage. To gauge this factor,

we can assume that Treasury bond yields simply tread water, rising and falling by an unusually large amount, say, 0.04 percent (4 basis points) every day, and thus go nowhere for the next two years. Here is what would happen to each ETF:

TMV would decline to \$20 by the end of 2016 (5.3%), and to \$18.7 by the end of 2017 (11.6%).

TBT would decline to \$35.9 by the end of 2016 (2.6%), and to \$34.8 by the end of 2017 (5.7%).

TBF would decline to \$22.5 by the end of 2016 (0.8%), and to \$22.2 by the end of 2017 (1.8%).

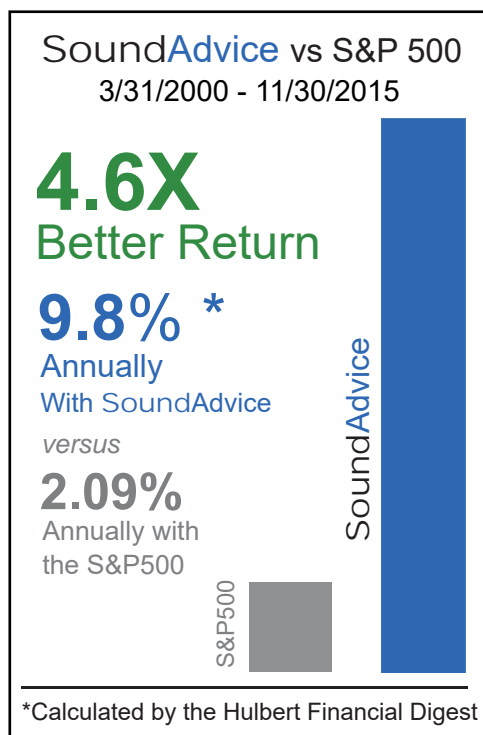
While not insignificant, this erosion factor is nominal in comparison to the price swings caused by a change in bond yields.

Hedging the Portfolio

Since June 2015, our *Sound Advice* Diffusion Index of Lagging

Indicators (page 11) has been issuing a caution signal. At times like this, it is vital to confine portfolio selections to special situations and focus on value.

The **ProShares UltraShort S&P 500 (SDS)** is a reverse ETF, which means it moves in the opposite direction of the market. This ETF is designed to produce two times the daily fluctuations of the S&P 500 index. A decline of say, 1.0 percent in the S&P 500 will cause SDS to increase by 2.0 percent. Conversely, an increase in the S&P 500 will cause SDS to decline in the same fashion. We have been tracking SDS and confirmed that it performs as it should, with daily premiums and discounts within 0.5 percent. It is also very liquid.



Income With Growth	Symbol	Price / NAV	Yield	Action	Limit
Hersha Hospitality Trust	HT	\$21.34	5.25%	BUY	\$24.00
Retail Opportunity Investment Corp	ROIC	\$20.12	3.58%	BUY	\$21.00
Diversified Growth					
Agrium	AGU	\$88.29	3.96%	BUY	\$95.00
Alcoa	AA	\$9.58	1.25%	BUY	\$10.50
Boston Scientific	BSX	\$18.81	0.00%	BUY	\$19.50
Disney	DIS	\$99.31	1.38%	BUY	\$104.00
Ford Motor Company	F	\$13.50	5.19%	BUY	\$15.00
NCR Corp	NCR	\$29.93	0.00%	BUY	\$31.00
Pfizer	PFE	\$29.64	4.05%	BUY	\$33.00
Stryker Corp.	SYK	\$107.29	1.42%	BUY	\$108.00
Symantec	SYMC	\$18.38	3.26%	BUY	\$23.00
Tekla Life Sciences Fund	HQL	\$17.94	0.00%	BUY	\$20.00
Tetra Tech	TTEK	\$29.82	1.07%	BUY	\$30.00
Third Avenue Real Estate Value Investor	TVRVX	\$28.44	1.55%	BUY	\$30.00
Third Avenue Small-Cap Value Investor Fund	TVSVX	\$19.19	0.00%	BUY	\$20.00
Xerox	XRX	\$11.16	2.51%	BUY	\$12.00
Energy/Natural Resources					
Chevron	CVX	\$95.40	4.49%	BUY	\$98.00
Fidelity Select Nat. Gas Fund	FSNGX	\$21.12	0.00%	BUY	\$23.00
ICON Energy Fund Class S	ICENX	\$11.27	0.00%	BUY	\$13.00
Transocean	RIG	\$9.14	0.00%	BUY	\$14.00
Valero	VLO	\$64.14	3.74%	BUY	\$69.00
Aggressive Growth					
Chesapeake Energy Corp	CHK	\$4.12	0.00%	BUY	\$6.00
ETF - Direxion Daily 20+ Yr Bear 3X	TMV	\$21.15	0.00%	BUY	\$28.00
ETF - ProShares Short 20+ Year Trsry	TBF	\$22.65	0.00%	BUY	\$25.00
ETF - ProShares UltraShort 20+ Year Trsry	TBT	\$36.86	0.00%	BUY	\$44.00
Freeport-McMoRan	FCX	\$10.34	0.00%	BUY	\$12.00
S&P 500 ProShares Ultra Short ETF	SDS	\$18.95	0.00%	BUY	\$24.00

Notes to the table:

Prices are as of 3/31/2016. See our website for live pricing and buy limits:

<http://www.soundadvice-newsletter.com/members>

The right hand column is the highest recommended price limit for purchases.

This table has live prices, charts & buy limits on our website: <http://www.soundadvice-newsletter.com/members>

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. The table above divides the portfolio into four sectors; Income with Growth, Diversified Growth, Energy and Natural Resources, and Aggressive Growth.

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 100+ 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 in which we divide the Standard and Poor's 500 Stock Index average by the median price of a new house 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 can, therefore, label this new tool the SoundAdvice "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 underperforming the other market.

What is too high? When stock prices are very high relative to house prices, the SoundAdvice 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 SoundAdvice 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.

The figures show that over the entire century-plus, stock prices have outperformed housing prices. Just based on the price growth of each investment market and assuming no leverage was used, a \$25,000 investment would have grown to \$12.1 million in stocks and to \$1.5 million in houses.

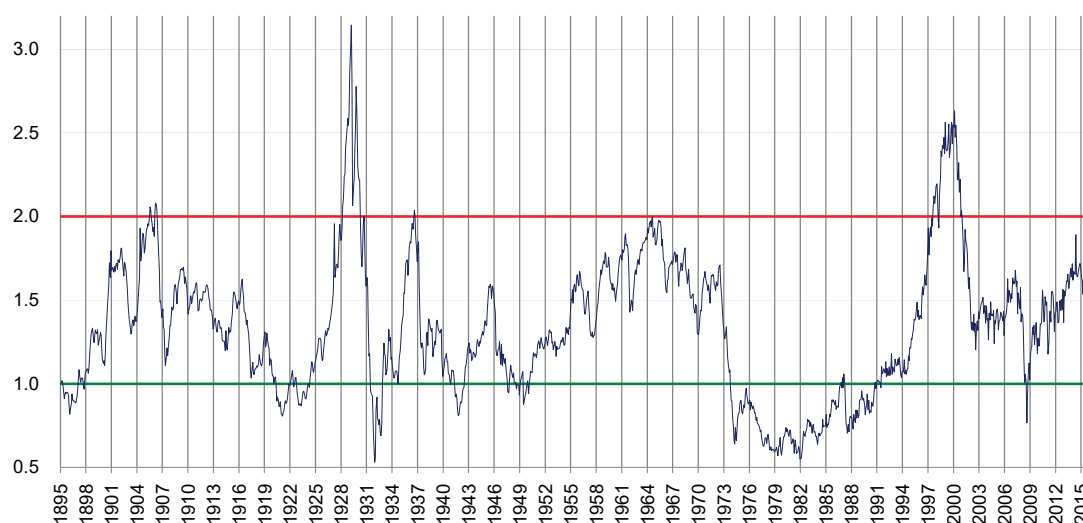
But though an investment beginning with \$25,000 in 1895 could have made money being in either stocks or housing and simply leaving it there over such a long period of time, had the investor followed the signals of the SoundAdvice Risk Indicator he would have made \$482 million, or 39.7 times more money—the difference between profits the buy-and-hold stock market strategy would have yielded by itself and the profits that the SoundAdvice Risk Indicator would have provided.

These figures illustrate why it is so important to remain aware of the Supercycles that are at work within markets.

The SoundAdvice Risk Indicator

The latest reading for the SoundAdvice Risk Indicator is 1.71. This reading reveals that stock prices are close to average in relation to house prices. The February 2009 reading of 0.77 marked the low for this cycle as well as the beginning of Supercycle 6.

See *The Science of Making Money in Turbulent Markets* for a complete explanation of the SoundAdvice Risk Indicator and its track record. (You received a copy of this book with your subscription, and you will also receive an updated copy when you renew your subscription.)



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 published monthly by The Conference Board. 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 SoundAdvice Diffusion Indexes, we observe changes in each of our selected indicators over a six-month period. For every indicator that is unchanged from its value during the six-month span, we will attach a value of one half point (0.5). If an indicator falls below its level six months prior, it will be given a value of zero. If an indicator is higher than it was six months before, it is assigned a value of 1.0. The sum of all of these figures will be expressed as a percentage of the total number of indicators. If, for example, one indicator is up (+1) at the end of a six-month period, one is unchanged (+0.5), and one is down (0), the diffusion index will be (1.5)/3 or 50 percent.

When the SoundAdvice 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 six 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 March, 2015.

The previous zero reading was in April, 2009, 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.

However, the March 2015 signal was usurped by the SoundAdvice Diffusion Index of LAGGING Indicators, which 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.

This has been a critical indicator in the past and has aided in avoiding severe declines, most notably the crash of 2008-09.

The most recent Caution signal came in June 2015, based on the June 2015 release of the May lagging economic indicators. This was just after the S&P 500 peaked at 2,130.82 on May 27, 2015.

We are still in Caution mode. Our next signal will come from a zero reading from the SoundAdvice Diffusion Index of LEADING Indicators, which will reverse our current Caution signal. This Diffusion Index read 33.3 percent based on the most recent February 2015 leading indicators (released in February). It is interesting to note that a zero reading would occur for April (released in May) if all of the selected underlying leading indicators remained unchanged.

Track Record of the SoundAdvice Diffusion Indexes

If we had followed the signals from our Diffusion Indexes over the years, we would have done very well indeed. The results are shown below. After each "Aggressive" signal, the S&P 500 climbed an average of 31.5 percent. During "Caution" signals, the S&P 500 increased an average of 2.3 percent.

Aggressive	S&P	Caution	S&P
Sep-74	68.1	Apr-76	101.9
Jul-76	104.2	Dec-76	104.7
Oct-78	100.6	Jun-79	101.7
Nov-79	100.0	Oct-83	167.7
Aug-84	164.5	Jun-85	188.9
Jul-86	240.2	Aug-87	329.4
Feb-88	258.1	Jun-88	270.7
Mar-89	280.0	Mar-93	449.7
Mar-95	493.2	Dec-98	1,141.0
Jun-00	1,429.4	Dec-00	1,320.3
Jun-03	974.5	May-05	1,191.5
Jun-06	1,276.7	Mar-08	1,325.4
Apr-09	848.2	Mar-12	1,370.3
Mar-15	2,080.0	May-15	2,111.9
Ave +/-	31.5%		2.3%

See *The Science of Making Money in Turbulent Markets* for a complete explanation of the SoundAdvice Diffusion Indexes and their track record. (You received a copy of this book with your paid subscription, and you will also receive an updated copy when you renew your subscription.)

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