

# SoundAdvice

Advising Investors for 30+ years

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## Perched for Perfection

The stock market has risen to its previous heights, reached prior to the introduction of the COVID-19 pandemic. Evidently, the market has been anticipating a V-shaped recovery, looking past the valley of any destruction caused by the pandemic, to a quick restoration of growth. Integral in this view is that a vaccine is around the corner, and as a result, economic activity will resume quickly at an essentially uninterrupted continuation of past growth.

### The Path to a Cure

The June 14 *New York Times Magazine* had an authoritative roundtable with several experts discussing the issues and timeline regarding a potential vaccine or treatment for COVID-19. (1) It is lengthy and very credible. Here are the highlights we believe are relevant to the financial outlook:

In the history of medicine, rarely has a vaccine been developed in less than five years. Among the fastest was the current mumps vaccine which took four years. Antiviral drugs for treating viruses have taken at least a decade.

Even after a promising vaccine has been discovered, it must go through three trials before it can be considered safe. Each of these trials take from a few months to several years, depending on results. The first human trials (Phase 1) are on a small number. If results are encouraging, Phase 2 trials involve a larger number. If results are still encouraging, safety and efficacy can only be determined by Phase 3 trials which involve tens of thousands of participants. The rigors of these trials cannot be abandoned to ensure safety of a potential vaccine or drug treatment.

To speed up this process, there is the concept of moving faster to Phase 3 trials, so-called “challenge” trials, where



Gray Cardiff, Editor

Investment returns in prior years have been calculated independently by the Hulbert Financial Group and concur with ours. From 2000 through 2019, the *Sound Advice* model portfolio averaged a 9.8% annual return versus 4.0% from the S&P 500.

say 15,000 people are given the proposed vaccine and 15,000 are given a placebo. Then all 30,000 are infected. Over the next few months or years observations are made. This is a more acceptable option when there is a remedy for those who do not recover, such as in the case of malaria. However, there is no treatment for COVID-19.

### The Approaches

The approach to establish prior vaccines has been to grow the virus in a medium (usually eggs) and then inactivate it such that it is unable to infect cells but still detectable by the body so that an immune response is elicited. However, if the vaccine is not fully inactivated, the actual disease can be contracted.

Aimed at mitigating this risk, gene-based vaccines are being explored, whereby a small portion of the virus is inserted into DNA or RNA. However, complexities remain regarding how to deliver this type of vaccine into human cells. Currently, there are no other approved DNA or RNA vaccines.

### The Financial Incentives

Developing vaccines is expensive while results are uncertain. Because vaccines are viewed as for the public good, it is expected that pricing pressures will exist. Rarely

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does a vaccine become a financial blockbuster, worthy of the expense and risk of development.

Additionally, liability issues arise because otherwise healthy participants in trials are not being treated for an existing problem they already have. Instead, they are being infected with a disease for which there is no cure. To manage this risk, trials are done more slowly, with a variety of candidates.

### Production

Once a vaccine has been developed and proven safe, it then has to be manufactured. In this case, extremely large volumes will be needed worldwide. Accordingly, the manufacturing process will need to be safe and scalable through a highly technologically-consistent process. This will not be an easy task, especially if the vaccine needs to be refrigerated or frozen for delivery. The hotspots will need it first, which will likely be underdeveloped countries with poor infrastructures. Nationalist and political issues will undoubtedly arise regarding those who should receive it first, especially within the country where it is developed first.

### Conclusion

Realistically, the 12 to 18 months that most people have been saying would be a pretty good marker but still optimistic.

### Economic Forecasts

In June, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) revised its global growth projection to a contraction of 4.9 percent in 2020 from its April forecast of a 3.0 percent contraction. The primary reasons for the more pessimistic outlook was because the COVID-19 pandemic has had a more negative impact on activity in the first half of 2020 than anticipated, and the recovery is now projected to be more gradual than previously forecast.

Deloitte recently published its thorough review of near-term economic prospects. (2) The report concludes that a projection of a quick and strong rebound in the third quarter is optimistic. More realistically, the shape of the recovery is dependent on medical conditions improving by the third quarter of 2020, and the swift creation of a successful vaccine. Even if a vaccine is available as soon as January, as Dr. Anthony Fauci of the National Institutes of Health has suggested is a possibility, manufacture and deployment of the vaccine globally will still be a matter of years, not months.

The first round of layoffs were concentrated in industries that people began shunning, but there is very likely to be a second round of layoffs and shuttered businesses as aggregate demand crashes. That second round will look more like a traditional recession, with car sales remaining

low, falling house prices, and consumer spending contracting. Because consumer spending contributes to approximately 70 percent of the US GDP, there is a strong likelihood of a slow recovery.

### The Sound Advice Stock Market Indicators

The **Sound Advice Risk Indicator** (page 10) is substantially above 2.0 again, revealing that the risk in the stock market is high. Moreover, the **Diffusion Index of Lagging Indicators** (page 11) is still in caution mode.

In addition, with the market perched at previous peak levels, the current price/earnings (P/E) ratio is historically high, which anticipates robust growth immediately ahead. This is inconsistent with the prospects of a slow and likely delayed recovery.

### Updating 2020 Earnings Projections

Since our last issue one month ago, projected contractions of Gross domestic product (GDP) and earnings have become somewhat less optimistic. After contracting 1.2 percent in the first quarter, GDP is still projected to contract another 12 percent in the second quarter according to the Congressional Budget Office (CBO). To put this into context, during the last recession, which was the most brutal since the Great Depression in the 1930s, GDP fell 4.3 percent from its peak in the fourth quarter of 2007 to its trough in the second quarter of 2009.

GDP is a measure of the output of goods and services, and there is a long-standing strong correlation between changes in GDP and corporate earnings. With GDP projected to contract by more than it did in the last recession, corporate operating earnings are bound to fall sharply in 2020.

### Operating Earnings Versus Reported (GAAP) Earnings

Note that we are referencing “operating” earnings, which are cash earnings without special, non-cash charges included in “reported” earnings which include write-offs such as depreciation, impairment charges due to falling in commodity prices, or charges for bad loan reserves. In their regular quarterly earnings reports, companies normally state both: so-called GAAP (generally accepted accounting principles) earnings which include non-cash charges, as well as operating earnings which reflect actual cash results.

During economic downturns, GAAP earnings become much more volatile because they contain relatively large non-cash adjustments. Investors tend to view these as one-off accounting adjustments, and not as important as actual cash operating earnings.

**A Constant Measure**

As quarterly operating earnings drop during recessions, so does the trailing four-quarter total which is widely used to calculate the price-to-earnings (P/E) ratio of the market. Notably, during these periods, the trailing P/E ratio based on operating earnings remains relatively stable.

This stands to reason because investors are facing great uncertainty and the future is much less predictable than usual. However, investors can look back and measure the market against operating earnings during the most recent four quarters. Although quarterly operating earnings are dropping and the end of the decline is unknown, investors know that operating earnings always recover after recessions. Sooner or later, the most recent four quarters of operating earnings will recur. Accordingly, investors are willing to pay a reasonable P/E based on those operating earnings.

During the last recession, the P/E on the trailing four-quarter operating earnings averaged 17.8 while staying within a narrow range, with a low of 17.09 and a high of 18.36. Trailing four-quarter operating earnings declined 46 percent through the fourth quarter of 2008 before quarterly earnings started increasing again, and this is close to the amount stock prices dropped.

**A Likely Projection**

Since the peak of the last recession, the P/E of the S&P 500 has averaged 18.03 based on the total of the trailing four quarters of operating earnings. To see a likely path of stock prices ahead, we can apply this P/E to the rolling four quarter total of operating earnings that are projected in the quarters ahead.

During the 2020 first quarter, operating earnings ended up declining by 48.7 percent from the same quarter

one year ago. Operating earnings for the second quarter that just ended are expected to see a 42.5 percent decline from one year ago and are expected to decline (year-over-year) in the third and fourth quarters as well.

The operating earnings projections shown in the table below are from S&P Senior Index Analyst, Howard Silverblatt, who publishes extensive data of the S&P 500 companies.

Based on an average P/E of 18.03, the downside risk for the S&P index is a decline to below 2,000 later this year – a drop of 33 percent.

**The Portfolio**

For many months prior to COVID-19, we have been one of the few advisory services warning that the market was significantly over-valued, and that you should be defensive while keeping a substantial amount of cash on the sidelines. Our concern was that the market was vulnerable to “an accident waiting to happen”. Of course, no one could have predicted this COVID-19 crisis, but this was the “accident”.

Based on the previous discussions, our investing approach continues to be defensive. We continue to recommend that you keep a substantial amount of cash on the sidelines. We cannot tell you how much, because we are not familiar with your particular financial situation, but it should be substantial to you. All recommendations are summarized in the table on page 9 and sorted by investment objective categories and then in alphabetical order.

Our portfolio recommendations are made with regard to the money you have allocated to the stock

**Earnings Projections for the S&P 500**

Quarter Ending	Quarterly Earnings	Actual/Projected	Change Y/Y	Trailing 4Q Earnings	Change Y/Y	S&P 500 @18.03 P/E
6/30/2019	40.14	Actual	3.9%	154.54	10.1%	
9/30/2019	39.81	Actual	-3.8%	152.97	1.7%	
12/31/2019	39.18	Actual	11.8%	157.12	3.6%	
3/31/2020	19.50	Actual	-48.7%	138.63	-9.4%	2499.50
6/30/2020	23.07	Projected	-42.5%	121.56	-21.3%	2191.73
9/30/2020	31.03	Projected	-22.1%	112.78	-26.3%	2033.42
12/31/2020	35.88	Projected	-8.4%	109.48	-30.3%	1973.92

Earnings projections are by S&P Senior Index Analyst, Howard Silverblatt who publishes extensive data of the S&P 500 companies. See <https://us.spindices.com/documents/additional-material/sp-500-eps-est.xlsx>

market, and in accordance with our current cautionary mode. To add downside protection, we continue to recommend hedging your portfolio.

**ProShares UltraShort S&P 500 (SDS)** essentially short-sells the market and will benefit from down-drafts in the S&P 500. It 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 is performing as it should, with daily premiums and discounts within 0.5 percent. It is also very liquid.

### Real Estate Stocks

In view of the risks presented by the COVID-19 crisis, we previously recommended moving up the credit chain by investing in preferred stocks rather than common shares when possible. Preferred stocks generally have a relatively small number of outstanding shares, so we recommend using limit orders rather than market orders.

**Hersha's Preferred D (HTPRD)** has tremendous upside potential. The ticker symbols on this preferred D vary from HT.PD, HT'D for an iPhone, and Fidelity uses HTPRD.

The company suspended operations at most of its 48 hotels. Those that remain open are operating with skeleton crews while attempting to generate some revenue through unique channels with medical personnel, government agencies, emergency first responders, and law enforcement.

Hersha has received a waiver of its debt covenants through March 31, 2021. Beyond then, in the event that these covenants are not met (or not re-negotiated), lenders have the right to escrow funds for the purpose of paying debt service on a property-by-property basis. Management believes that the company will be able to generate sufficient liquidity to satisfy its obligations through that extension period.

We are recommending the preferred shares because they have a liquidation preference of \$25 per share which comes before the common stock. At the end of 2019, value of the company's properties provided equity to fund the \$25 liquidation preference with enough left over to provide equity of approximately \$24 for each share of common stock. Of course, the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the hospitality industry adversely, raising fears that Hersha could fall into liquidation. However, even if the properties were valued at 68 cents on the dollar, there would still be sufficient equity for the \$25 liquidation preference for the preferred shares, with nothing for the common.

Evidently, the market is not viewing Hersha's situation that drastically because the price of common stock

(HT) reflects substantial equity, well beyond the \$25 liquidation preference of the preferred stocks. However, our recommended preferred D is trading at less than one-half its liquidation preference value. A partial explanation of the undervaluation is the suspension of the dividend payments on both company's preferred and common stocks for the balance of 2020 to enhance liquidity. However, this preferred stock is cumulative, which means that all unpaid preferred dividends must be restored before dividends on the common stock can be resumed. The preferred dividends in 2019 amounted to 26 percent of the company's FFO, which means that it will be much easier to restore the preferred stock dividends as we come out of the current recession.

The resumption and payment of unpaid dividends of \$1.64 per share (annually) on the preferred D would provide above a 14 percent annual yield based on today's stock price. Of course, just the prospect of a resumption of the dividend would propel a steep recovery in the price of the preferred D stock to its liquidation value of \$25.

**RLJ Lodging Trust (RLJ)** has also suspended operations at over 50% of its hotel portfolio and drastically reduced operating costs. We are recommending the company's **\$1.95 Series A Cumulative Convertible Preferred Shares (RLJPRA)** which is often quoted as RLJ.PA, but on the iPhone it is RLJ'A, and Fidelity uses RLJPRA. In any case, this is the only RLJ preferred stock.

This preferred stock has a liquidation preference of \$28.50 per share. Although RLJ reduced its dividend on the common stock to enhance liquidity, it is continuing to pay the dividend on the preferred stock at the annual rate of \$1.95 per share.

In the event that any dividends are suspended on this preferred stock, they would have to be made up before any dividends on the common stock could be paid. However, a suspension of the preferred dividend appears extremely unlikely. The preferred dividend in 2019 amounted to only 6.8 percent of the company's FFO.

Additionally, because this preferred stock is a small portion of the company's capitalization, the value of the company's real estate portfolio would have to drop to 27 cents on the dollar from its 2019 value for the full liquidation preference of this stock to be jeopardized. The market does not think that will happen because the common stock is reflecting substantial equity. As long as there is any equity in the common stock, the implication is that the preferred stock is worth its full liquidation preference value of \$28.50. Yet it is trading substantially below that value and yielding close to 9 percent. Quite a value.

**RPT Realty 7.25% Series D Cumulative Convertible Perpetual Preferred** pays an annual dividend of \$3.62. It is a convertible preferred stock, convertible into 3.7758 shares of the common stock (RPT). The ticker symbol of

this preferred stock varies depending on the device you are using or the brokerage service. It is often quoted as RPT.PD, but on the iPhone it is RPT'D, and Fidelity uses RPTPRD. In any case, this is the only RPT preferred stock for RPT Realty.

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. Centers also include entertainment components, including theaters, fitness centers, and restaurants.

RPT continues to offer a complimentary "Tenant Concierge Service" to provide its small business tenants with direct access to a law firm that will assist in applying for governmental aid under the CARES Act. This service is being offered at no charge.

Under the CARES Act, nearly all tenants in shopping centers qualify as small businesses and are therefore entitled to assistance under the act for paying their rent. Tenants qualifying for rental assistance also includes most franchised retailers who would not otherwise qualify as a small business. The CARES Act allows businesses with up to 500 workers in a single location to apply for loans as a small business. As such, loans would convert into grants that don't have to be repaid for amounts spent on payroll, utilities, and rent.

We are recommending preferred stock in lieu of the common stock because it is inherently safer. RPT has covenants regarding its debt, including maintaining a minimum tangible net worth, overall debt leverage, and various other calculations. As of March 31, 2020, the company was in compliance with these covenants. These covenants are usually negotiable but not necessarily. The company's near-term financial condition is unpredictable, and a substantial deterioration could cause lenders to accelerate debt payments and force liquidation.

The preferred stock has a liquidation preference of \$50 per share which was well-covered at the company's 2019 property values. Because this preferred stock is a small portion of the company's capitalization, the value of the company's real estate portfolio would have to drop to 36 cents on the dollar from its 2019 value for the full liquidation preference to be jeopardized.

Like our other preferred selections, evidently the market does not think that will happen. The common stock is reflecting significant equity, which means the preferred stock is worth its full liquidation preference value of \$50. Yet it is trading at less than two-thirds of that value and yielding close to 11 percent.

To preserve liquidity, RPT has suspended the dividend on the common stock, but is maintaining the dividend on the preferred stock. The preferred dividend only absorbed 6.6 percent of the company's funds from operations (FFO) in 2019, which means it is relatively secure. If it is suspended, all unpaid preferred dividends must be paid first, and paid in full before any dividends are paid on the common stock.

**Third Avenue Real Estate Value Investor Fund (TVRVX)** 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. 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 has a similar approach to ours because it 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 a substantial amount of their personal assets into their funds.

## Financials

In late June, banking regulators announced the easing of restrictions created by the Dodd-Frank Act passed in the aftermath of the last 2008-09 recession, aimed at freeing up billions for lending.

The Federal Reserve Board also released the results of its stress tests for 2020 and additional coronavirus sensitivity analyses to assess the resiliency of large banks under three hypothetical recovery scenarios: V-shape, slower U-shape, and a double-dip W-shape.

In the three downside scenarios, the unemployment rate peaked at between 15.6 percent and 19.5 percent, loan losses for the 34 banks ranged from \$560 billion to \$700 billion, and capital ratios declined from 12.0 percent in the fourth quarter of 2019 to between 9.5 percent and 7.7 percent.

To ensure large banks remain resilient under any of these scenarios, the Federal Reserve is requiring large banks to preserve capital by suspending share repurchases during the third quarter. Dividend payments must be capped and paid based on recent income.

Our two selections are still substantially below their peak levels and are presenting compelling values with attractive dividend yields. They have both took substantial loan loss charges in the first quarter to account for potential future

losses, which means any surprises ahead should reflect positively on reported earnings.

**JP Morgan Chase (JPM)** has a dividend yield of close to 3.6 percent.

**Wells Fargo (WFC)** currently has a dividend above 7 percent. However, this dividend may be subject to adjustment under the above regulations.

### Medically-Related Selections

Both of our selections make medical devices and products which are well-suited for an aging population. They are defensive in nature because they are not largely dependent on economic conditions. They were both impacted by deferrals of elective surgical procedures during the COVID-19 outbreak. These deferrals have built up a pent-up demand because most of these procedures are actually essential ones and have to be performed sooner or later to treat debilitating, painful, and sometimes life-threatening conditions.

**Boston Scientific (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 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)** provides 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. SYK has a very high return on equity which is propelled by its strong balance sheet and its ability to make strategic acquisitions.

### The Best in Biotech ETFs

Both of our selections have even surpassed previous peak prices reached earlier this year; before the Coronavirus pandemic arrived. This relative strength underscores the vitality of the industry and these selections.

Biotechnology has become a major industry and the source of the world's top breakthrough drugs. Biotech companies offer the most explosive profits in the healthcare industry. However, stocks of individual biotech companies are often volatile. Diversification is essential and can be accomplished by investing in a diversified biotech electronically traded fund (ETF) investing exclusively in a portfolio of biotech companies. We are recommending two top performers.

**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 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.

### Small Caps

**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 (TVRVX). Management scours the investment universe for companies that combine the three main features: creditworthiness, a meaningful discount to a conservatively estimated net asset value, 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.

Numerous studies show that small caps perform better over the long run than the market as a whole. Small Caps 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.

### 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.

**Apple (AAPL)** has been flying high and is over-valued currently. Our target price remains at \$262 per share. The stock price dropped below that in March and should do so again.

The company has \$206 billion in cash in the company's coffers which amounts to \$46 per share, so we are actually paying that much less per share for the company. However, the stock price needs to retreat from peak levels to make AAPL a value proposition.

**Intel (INTC)** 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.

As we have been pointing out in recent issues, Intel is developing a key role in providing infrastructure for 5G networks. The company recently added 18 new products in this segment. These are bound to be vital for the 6 million 5G base stations forecasted to be in place by 2024. Estimations are that Intel will capture 40 percent of this market by the end of 2021.

**International Business Machines (IBM)** is seeing growth in revenue from the hybrid data center market stemming from its Red Hat acquisition. IBM can offer technology consulting services, via Red Hat, to customers modernizing legacy cloud services to work on scalable public platforms, including IBM Cloud, Amazon AWS, Microsoft Azure, Google Cloud, and even Alibaba.

The company is also capitalizing on its OpenShift platform along with the company’s artificial intelligence (AI) platform, it calls “Watson”, which can “think” like a human.

The dividend yield is over 5 percent.

**NCR Corp (NCR)** makes automatic tellers (ATMs), retail point-of-sale (POS) workstations, self-service kiosks, and other self-service checkout systems. Until stay-in-place orders vacated retail centers, 485 million people used NCR products every day. When the crisis passes and shoppers return, there is room for substantial growth in the US and around the world. Last year, NCR earned \$3.54 per share. Based on those normalized earnings, the current price of this stock reflects an incredibly cheap P/E under 6.

**Invesco S&P 500 Equal Weight Consumer Staples ETF (ticker symbol: RHS)** is a diversified way of investing in the consumer staples sector - 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 tracks a collection of 33 consumer staple stocks within the S&P 500 index (shown in the nearby table.)

This ETF is unique because it invests equal amounts in these 33 stocks and rebalances the investments at

## Invesco (RHS) Portfolio of Consumer Staples

Name	Symbol	Weight %
McCormick & Co Inc/MD	MKC	3.43
Clorox Co/The	CLX	3.41
Kroger Co/The	KR	3.41
Monster Beverage Corp	MNST	3.34
General Mills Inc	GIS	3.34
Campbell Soup Co	CPB	3.33
Brown-Forman Corp	BF/B	3.29
Conagra Brands Inc	CAG	3.23
Church & Dwight Co Inc	CHD	3.19
Kellogg Co	K	3.15
Kraft Heinz Co/The	KHC	3.13
JM Smucker Co/The	SJM	3.10
PepsiCo Inc	PEP	3.08
Kimberly-Clark Corp	KMB	3.08
Hormel Foods Corp	HRL	3.07
Constellation Brands Inc	STZ	3.04
Costco Wholesale Corp	COST	3.03
Walmart Inc	WMT	2.99
Estee Lauder Cos Inc/The	EL	2.98
Tyson Foods Inc	TSN	2.97
Colgate-Palmolive Co	CL	2.97
Sysco Corp	SYU	2.96
Mondelez International Inc	MDLZ	2.96
Coca-Cola Co/The	KO	2.92
Lamb Weston Holdings Inc	LW	2.92
Procter & Gamble Co/The	PG	2.91
Archer-Daniels-Midland Co	ADM	2.90
Hershey Co/The	HSY	2.87
Altria Group Inc	MO	2.84
Philip Morris International Inc	PM	2.81
Walgreens Boots Alliance Inc	WBA	2.75
Molson Coors Beverage Co	TAP	2.60
Coty Inc	COTY	2.03

the beginning of each calendar quarter.

This practice has given RHS a superior performance because it gives investors exposure to many consumer staple stocks that are under-weighted in most portfolios, making them targets for new investment capital. Earnings of consumer staple stocks are expected to continue to grow or remain steady while earnings of most other

stocks are crashing and expected to be even worse throughout 2020.

The current coronavirus outbreak has given us a lesson on why consumer staples stocks generally provide stable investments. The nature of the COVID-19 pandemic has given cleaning products a larger boost than a typical recession, a demand that will likely reflect a “new-normal”.

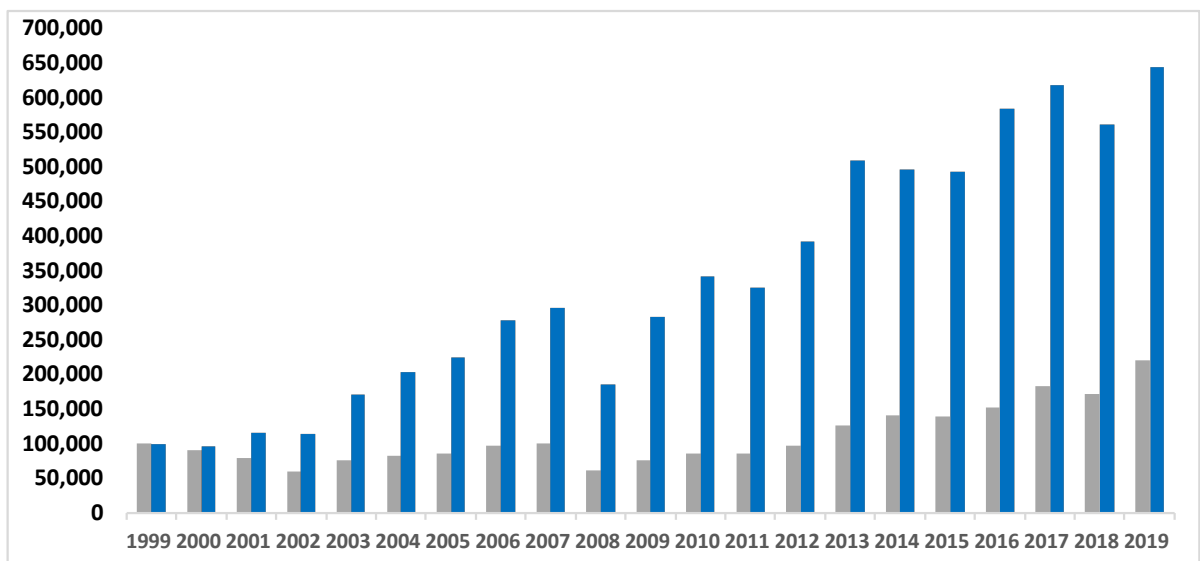
**Valero Energy (VLO)** is a joint-venture partner with Diamond Green Diesel, which is producing renewable diesel at large profitable margins even during the COVID-19 pandemic. Renewable diesel is made from animal or plant waste material which reduces greenhouse gas emissions up to 80 percent because it only releases as much carbon dioxide that the material originally contained. Renewable diesel does not gel at low temperatures which means it can be easily transported through pipelines. Use for sustainable aviation fuel is expected to be a primary escalating demand factor.

Although renewable diesel is bound to become a growing portion of Valero’s operations, declining oil prices adds profits to petroleum-based products because profits come from the “crack-spread”, the difference between the cost of oil as a feedstock and the price of refined products, predominantly gasoline and jet fuel. A lid is bound to be kept on oil prices for the foreseeable future as major oil producers compete for their portions of the petroleum market, including OPEC nations, Russia, and US frackers.

We continue to point out that Valero has the flexibility to refine substantial quantities of both US light sweet (low sulfur) as well as heavy sour crude. This bodes well under the new regulations and over the longer term. Valero also has access to the US pipeline network for delivery to its gulf coast locations. This flexibility allows the company to capture the highest margins among its competitors because it can take advantage of the temporary local gluts of crude, whether it’s low or high-quality crude, or light sweet or heavy sour, and receive the best discounts for its feedstocks.

### Sound Advice versus the S&P 500

This chart shows the growth of \$100,000 invested in the S&P 500 (in gray), which would have grown to \$219,925, versus \$643,554 if it was invested in the *Sound Advice* recommendations (in blue).



## 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	\$11.35	0.00%	BUY	\$19.00
International Business Machines	IBM	\$120.77	5.40%	BUY	\$126.81
RLJ Lodging Trust - Preferred A *	RLJPRA	\$21.89	8.91%	BUY	\$28.00
RPT Realty 7.25% Preferred D *	RPTPRD	\$34.16	10.61%	BUY	\$50.00
Valero	VLO	\$58.82	6.12%	BUY	\$61.76
Wells Fargo	WFC	\$25.60	7.97%	BUY	\$26.88
Growth with Moderate Income					
Intel	INTC	\$59.83	2.21%	BUY	\$62.82
Invesco Consumer Staples ETF	RHS	\$135.57	2.34%	BUY	\$142.35
JP Morgan Chase	JPM	\$94.06	3.83%	BUY	\$98.76
Growth					
Apple	AAPL	\$364.80	0.80%	HOLD	\$262.00
Boston Scientific	BSX	\$35.11	0.00%	BUY	\$36.87
Genomic Revolution Multi-Sector	ARKG	\$52.16	0.00%	BUY	\$54.77
NCR Corp	NCR	\$17.32	0.00%	BUY	\$18.19
Stryker Corp	SYK	\$180.19	1.28%	BUY	\$189.20
Third Avenue Real Estate Value Investor *	TVRVX	\$19.86	0.00%	BUY	\$23.00
Third Avenue Small-Cap Value Investor Fund *	TVSVX	\$14.13	0.00%	BUY	\$17.00
Virtus LifeSci Biotech Products	BBP	\$47.42	0.00%	BUY	\$49.79
Hedges					
S&P 500 ProShares Ultra Short ETF	SDS	\$19.40	0.00%	BUY	\$20.37

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

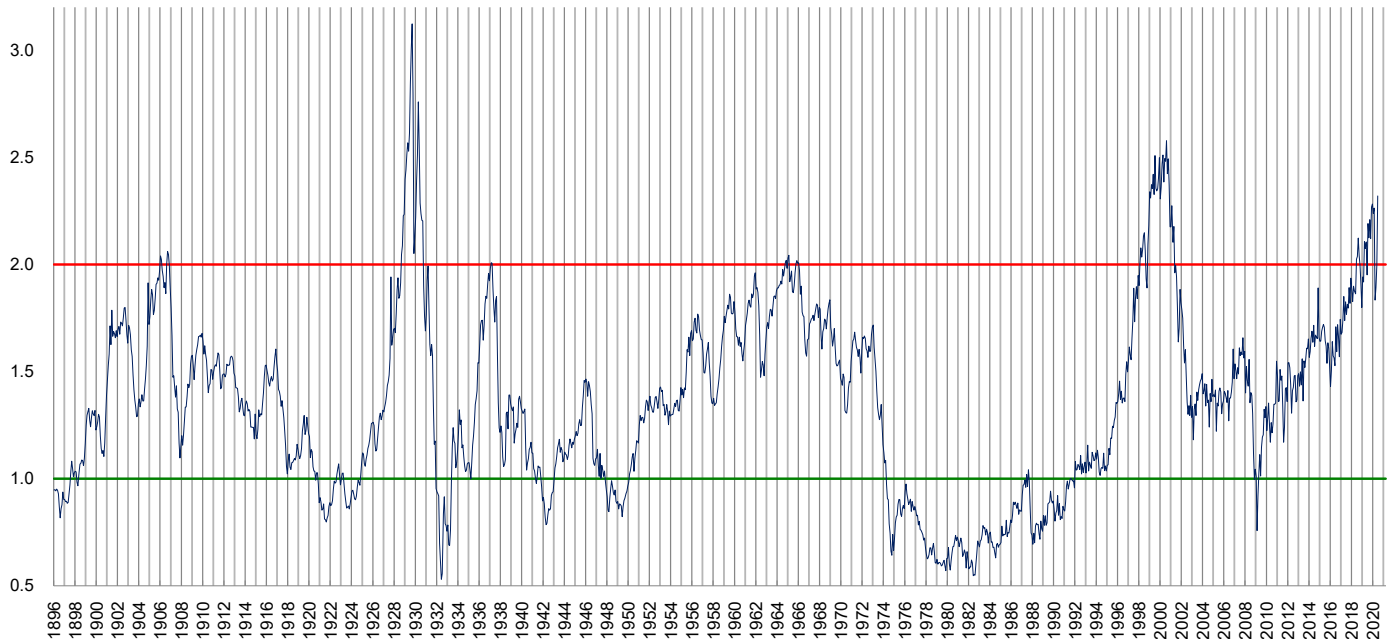
\* It is not possible to offer live pricing.

**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 \$487 million, or 26.5 times more money than by simply holding stocks though the ups and downs.

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 New York Times**

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

the Dow 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 remained above 2.0 through the high-point of the market in February 2020.

**With the latest median house price at \$303,000 in April and with the S&P 500 at 3100, the *Sound Advice* Risk Indicator reads 2.32, revealing the risk in stocks is very high.**

As remarkable as the *Sound Advice* Risk Indicator has been, it does not pinpoint the exact time. In the past 125 years, its signal has ranged from being only one month after the zenith to as much as four years early. While the Risk Indicator has been early, it has never been wrong. An expensive crash was inevitable. This time, the signal was 8 months prior to the peak.

To help us narrow down the timing as well as gage the potential severity of an upcoming decline, we have our Diffusion Indexes.

## Business Cycles and Stocks: The **SoundAdvice** Diffusion Indexes

### Track Record of the **SoundAdvice** Diffusion Indexes

After each "Aggressive" signal, the S&P 500 climbed an average of 30.8 percent. During "Caution" signals, the S&P 500 either crashed, meandered, or climbed, recording an average increase of 4.2 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
Sep-17	2,492.8	Jan-18	2,823.8
Ave +/-	30.8%		4.2%

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 **Sound Advice** Diffusion Indexes, we observe changes in each of our selected indicators over a six-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 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 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.

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.

#### Current Status

The Diffusion Index of LAGGING Indicators has been in caution mode. The most recent 100 percent reading was in January 2020, confirming previous 100 percent readings. **The latest data for May (reported in late June) caused a 33 percent reading.**

Our next signal will come from the Diffusion Index of LEADING Indicators, when it drops to zero. **The latest reading for May was 33 percent.**

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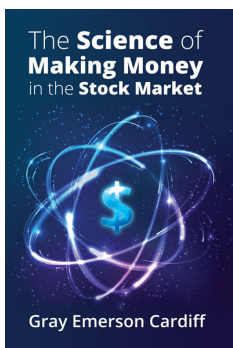
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