

Investing in the Basics

The economic landscape is changing dramatically. The best investments in 2020 were the “stay at home” stocks, especially the FANGMA stocks – Facebook, Amazon, Netflix, Google, Microsoft, and Apple. Most portfolios under-performed the popular averages in 2020 because they did not contain such an unreasonable weighting of these six stocks. However, these stocks will not be the best investments in 2021. Not only are they bloated with astronomical price/earnings (P/E) ratios, a number of factors promise to lure investors to better, more compelling values.

Vaccine rollouts, however bumpy, will be reopening the economy in 2021, aided by the government’s massive aid and stimulus packages. Meanwhile, the Federal Reserve will be holding short-term interest rates down to zero and buying massive amounts of Treasury bonds to finance a burgeoning Federal deficit while allowing the money supply to explode. Since the beginning of 2020, the broad measure of the money supply, M2, has increased by 24 percent. Since 1980, M2 has averaged an annual growth rate of 6 percent, rarely increasing by low double-digit rates.

For centuries, there has been an undeniably strong correlation between changes in the money supply and changes in the inflation rate in developed countries. According to the widely held correlation, this unprecedented money supply growth will lead to a significant increase in inflation.

Also down the road is the likelihood of an infrastructure spending program which could be financed by a tax increase. This probability was greatly increased by the victory of the two Senatorial runoff races in Georgia, giving Democrats 50 seats in the Senate and a majority along with a vote from the vice-president, while making Chuck Schumer the majority leader of the Senate with the power to set the agendas.

A Prime Beneficiary

The basic materials sector is an industry category made



Gray Cardiff, Editor

Investment returns in prior years have been calculated independently by the Hulbert Financial Group and concur with ours. From 2000 through 2020, the *Sound Advice* model portfolio averaged a 8.8% annual return versus 4.6% from the S&P 500.

up of businesses engaged in the discovery, development, and processing of raw natural materials used in construction and nearly all industry sectors. Basic materials companies include those in mining, refining of raw and finished metals, producing chemicals, and companies owning and developing forestry products. Also included in basic materials are containers and packaging made of glass, metal, or cardboard. Oil and gas are also considered basic materials but we prefer to exclude these companies because they are subject to other extraordinary political and international supply/demand factors.

Basic materials companies are particularly sensitive to economic changes. They thrive when the economy strengthens and are bound to benefit substantially in the months and years ahead as economic activity increases. Basic materials are also classic inflation hedges. Prices are typically pushed upward by increasing inflation, benefiting the entire sector.

The safest way to invest in this sector is through a vehicle with a diversified portfolio of such companies, such as a mutual fund, or preferably a more liquid electronically traded fund (ETF) that trades like a stock and can be purchased or sold anytime during market hours.

The largest ETF in this sector is the Materials Select Sector SPDR Fund (symbol XLB). However, the largest is not always the best, which is the case here. Of course, the underlying portfolio makes the fund, and XLB’s portfolio has an astonishingly high price/earnings (P/E) ratio of 71 based

Sound Advice is published monthly by S.A. Newsletters, LLC. ©2021 S.A. Newsletters, LLC. Editor: Gray Emerson Cardiff. Executive Editor: Linda Cardiff. Subscription rate: \$99 per year. Send subscription requests to: Sound Advice, 140 Town & Country Drive, Suite E, Danville, CA 94526. Phone: (925) 838-6710. Fax: (925) 838-0522. Information presented in Sound Advice may be used provided the newsletter—its name, address, and website—is mentioned as the source. The information contained herein has been carefully compiled from sources believed to be reliable, but accuracy cannot be guaranteed. When securities are initially recommended, the editors, affiliates, and associates of the editors do not have positions in such securities and are required to wait at least 1 business day from the date *Sound Advice* is posted before placing orders for them. After the initial recommendation, editors and staff members may own any or all of the securities discussed herein.

on the trailing twelve months (TTM) of earnings.

Another choice is the Vanguard Materials ETF (symbol VAW), but its holdings average an even higher TTM P/E ratio of 90.

In fact, most basic materials ETFs have substantially higher P/E ratios than the overall market, which as we note later is historically high.

After plowing through many alternatives, our favorite choice is the **Invesco S&P 500 Equal Weight Materials ETF (ticker symbol RTM)**. This ETF invests in the common stocks that comprise the S&P 500 Equal Weight Materials Index. That Index, as well as this ETF, rebalances holdings quarterly to equalize their values. Calendar rebalancing ensures a greater degree of evenly weighted diversification which adds stability and safety to a portfolio. This practice often provides a superior performance because it offers exposure to many stocks that are under-weighted in most other portfolios and are therefore targets for new capital.

RTM's current portfolio is shown in the table. All 29 sections are prime examples of basic materials companies outside of the oil and gas industries.

Management expenses are also low because it is automatically managed, without the added costs of highly-paid advisors. The annual expense ratio of RTM is a very low 0.4% of assets.

The average P/E ratio of RTM's portfolio is 24 based on trailing twelve-month (TTM) earnings and 19 based on forward earnings expected in 2021. Both measurements are below those of the market as a whole as measured by the S&P 500 stock index.

This ETF has enjoyed high ratings from Morningstar, an investment advisory service noted for its ratings of mutual funds and ETFs. Morningstar's ratings are based on a risk-adjusted return measure, which takes into account variations in monthly performance. RTM has consistently had Morningstar's highest ratings of 4 and 5 stars over various periods during the last 10 years.

RTM has done well over the last decade. For ten years through the end of 2020, RTM returned a compounded annual return of 11.6 percent. For the five years through the end of 2020, RTM returned a compounded annual return of 15.2 percent. In 2020, RTM had an investment return of 24.2 percent.

RTM has been a good investment during years when the timing for investing in basic materials was not particularly good. It should prove to be an even better investment now that the timing is good.

Sound Advice Stock Market Indicators

The **Sound Advice Risk Indicator** (page 10) remains substantially above 2.0, revealing that the risk in the stock market is still historically high. Additionally, the **Sound**

Invesco (RTM) Portfolio of Basic Materials

Company Name	Weight %
Albemarle Corp	4.335
Freeport-McMoRan Inc	4.137
DuPont de Nemours Inc	3.979
Mosaic Co/The	3.954
Vulcan Materials Co	3.81
Martin Marietta Materials Inc	3.763
Newmont Corp	3.614
LyondellBasell Industries NV	3.598
Corteva Inc	3.557
Avery Dennison Corp	3.549
CF Industries Holdings Inc	3.549
Linde PLC	3.546
Dow Inc	3.539
International Paper Co	3.497
Packaging Corp of America	3.492
International Flavors & Fragrances Inc	3.49
Air Products and Chemicals Inc	3.486
Celanese Corp	3.476
PPG Industries Inc	3.447
Sealed Air Corp	3.445
Westrock Co	3.439
Eastman Chemical Co	3.429
FMC Corp	3.419
Sherwin-Williams Co/The	3.342
Amcor PLC	3.335
Ecolab Inc	3.333
Nucor Corp	3.24
Ball Corp	3.199

Advice Diffusion Index of Lagging Indicators (page 11) is still in caution mode.

Clearly, the popular averages have been pumped up by historically low interest rates and low inflation, neither of which are compatible with a recovering economy with a greatly expanded money supply.

Does this mean we should simply sell everything and bail out of the market?

The 2020 Covid-19 pandemic bifurcated the market into two major segments: the stay-at-home-stocks and the victims of the economic fallout. While the stay-at-home

Operating Earnings Projections for the S&P 500

Quarter Ending	Quarterly Operating Earnings	Actual/Projected	TTM Operating Earnings	Value of the S&P 500 @TTM 19 P/E	Difference From the Current S&P 500
12/31/2019	39.18	Actual	157.12		
3/31/2020	19.50	Actual	138.63		
6/30/2020	26.79	Actual	125.28		
9/30/2020	0.00	Actual	123.37		
12/31/2020	38.17	Actual	122.36	2325	-37%
3/31/2021	37.65	Projected	140.51	2670	-28%
6/30/2021	40.35	Projected	154.07	2927	-21%
9/30/2021	39.85	Projected	160.08	3042	-18%
12/31/2021	45.10	Projected	167.01	3173	-15%

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>

companies flourished and watched their stocks soar, the victims watched their stocks get trampled down to unprecedented values.

As we all know, the market is a forward-looking mechanism. Investors are investing for the future, not the past. During recent months, we have seen a reversal of the Covid bifurcation as so-called “value” or “re-opening” stocks have been rising while the FANGMA stocks have languished. To prosper in the stock market, it will be crucial to follow this most recent trend by investing only in securities that have a compelling value proposition and that will benefit from reopening the economy.

The Portfolio

All of the *Sound Advice* model portfolio 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 in accordance with our current cautionary mode because they offer extraordinary values.

A Downside Hedge

Because of the unusually high downside risk in the S&P 500, we are including the [ProShares UltraShort S&P 500 \(SDS\)](#) as a necessary holding in the *Sound Advice* model portfolio. This ETF 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.

In addition to the *Sound Advice* indicators, we can see

that the market is substantially over-valued by traditional measures. As we note regularly, a reliable way to evaluate the S&P 500 index is to measure it against the trailing twelve-month (TTM) of “operating” earnings of the individual 500 stocks that make up the index.

We use *operating* earnings, which are cash earnings without special, non-cash charges included in so-called GAAP (generally accepted accounting principles) earnings which include non-cash write-offs such as depreciation, impairment charges because of falling commodity prices, or charges for bad loan reserves. Each quarter, companies report GAAP earnings, but they also report *operating* earnings which reflect actual cash results.

The price/earnings (P/E) ratio is above 30 based on the TTM operating earnings of the S&P 500 companies. This is a very high TTM P/E, which confirms that it is a very high-risk time for most stocks. The highest TTM P/E since the late 1980s was in the second quarter of 1999 when it was 29 in the midst of the dot-com bubble. That was less than one year from the market peak and the beginning of an extended bear market.

Since the 1980s, the TTM P/E based on operating earnings has averaged 19.06. To gauge a reasonable value for the market currently as well as a likely path of stock prices ahead, we can reasonably apply a P/E of 19 to the rolling TTM total of operating earnings. The operating earnings projections for the companies comprising the S&P 500 are shown in the table above.

It is worth noting that based on an average P/E of 19, the current downside risk for the S&P index is substantial. The TTM operating earnings of the companies that comprise the S&P 500 index were \$122.36 in the most recent fourth quarter. At a P/E of 19, the S&P 500 index would be 2,325, which is 37 percent lower than today's level of 3,314.

However, the market is anticipating a steep recovery in earnings.

By the fourth quarter of 2021, TTM operating earnings are projected to increase to \$157.01, close to the pre-Covid operating earnings recorded in the fourth quarter of 2019. Even assuming this projection is not optimistic, a P/E of 19 still puts the S&P 500 index 15 percent below today's level. Of course, the stock market typically moves in waves, over- and under-shooting reasonable values. The next correction will likely follow suit swinging by more than a 15 percent correction.

Real Estate Stocks

Our three cumulative preferred stocks are inherently safe because any unpaid dividends must be retroactively restored first before any common dividends can be paid. Additionally, in the event of a liquidation of the company, these preferred stocks have a "Liquidation Preference" which must be paid out in full before any proceeds are paid to common stockholders. In all three cases, there is substantial equity in the common stocks of all three companies, evidencing that the market does not expect liquidation to be plausible.

These preferred stocks are trading substantially below the company's call price (the right of the company to purchase the preferred at a certain "call" price), or have no call feature at all, which is very unusual for preferred stocks.

These preferred stocks have a small number of outstanding shares, which is typical for preferred stocks in general. Accordingly, we recommend using limit orders rather than market orders.

Hersha's Preferred D (HTRPD) have a liquidation preference of \$25 per share but are trading close to \$19 per share. Even if the properties were liquidated at 68 cents on the dollar, there would still be sufficient equity for the \$25 liquidation preference for the preferred shares. Since the pandemic started, Hersha has contracted to sell five hotels that are within 10 to 20 percent of pre-Covid-19 valuations. Evidently, the market does not consider liquidation likely because the price of common stock (HT) still reflects substantial equity.

In 2020, the company negotiated a suspension on its debt covenants until the end of June 2021. To conserve liquidity, the company suspended dividends for preferred and common stocks. 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 funds for operations (FFO), which means that it will be relatively easy to restore the preferred stock dividends prior to the resumption of common stock dividends.

The company can redeem (call) the shares at \$25 plus any unpaid dividends. The call date is on or after 5/21/21. However, that would represent a substantial profit from today's price.

The resumption and payment of dividends of \$1.64 per share (annually) on the preferred D would provide above an 8.7 percent current annual yield based on today's stock price. In addition, just the prospect of a resumption of the dividend would propel a steep recovery in the price of the stock back to its call-price and Liquidation Preference value of \$25. This would mean a 25 percent profit.

RLJ's \$1.95 Series A Cumulative Convertible Preferred (RLJPRA) is also presenting an exceptional value with a remarkable current yield of 7.6 percent. This is the only RLJ preferred stock and the dividend in 2019 amounted to only 6.8 percent of the company's FFO.

This preferred stock has a Liquidation Preference of \$25 per share. The market does not think liquidation is a potential issue because the common stock is reflecting substantial equity. 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 below 30 cents on the dollar from its 2019 value before the \$25 liquidation preference would be jeopardized.

RLJ-A is convertible into 0.2806 common shares in RLJ. This sets the conversion price at \$89.09 per common share. RLJ cannot force conversion unless their common shares are trading at 130% of the conversion price, or at a price of \$115.82. Since the price of RLJ is close to \$13, the preferred is essentially not callable without a nine-fold rise in the price of the common.

Although RLJ reduced its dividend on the common stock to preserve liquidity, it is continuing to pay the dividend on the preferred stock. A suspension of the preferred dividend appears extremely unlikely.

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

RPT Realty 7.25% Series D Cumulative Convertible Perpetual Preferred (RPTPRD) is not callable by the company. This means that we can lock in a very high yield for as long as we desire.

It pays an annual dividend of \$3.62, which is a current yield of 7 percent. This is the only RPT preferred stock for RPT Realty. This is a convertible preferred stock, convertible into 3.47 shares of the common stock (RPT) at the holder's option.

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

To preserve liquidity, RPT suspended the dividend on the common stock, but is maintaining the dividend on its preferred stock.

This preferred stock has a Liquidation Preference of \$50 per share which was well-covered at the company's 2019 property values. The preferred dividend only absorbed 6.6 percent of the company's funds from operations (FFO) in 2019, which means it is relatively secure. 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.

As in the cases of our other preferred selections, evidently the market does not think that will happen because the common stock is reflecting significant equity.

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

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

Medically-Related Selections

Both of our selections make medical devices and products which are well-suited for an aging population. They have both been negatively impacted by deferrals of elective surgical procedures during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, these deferrals have built up a pent-up demand because most of these procedures are essential and need to be performed sooner or later to treat debilitating, painful, and sometimes life-threatening conditions.

Boston Scientific (BSX) received US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approval of its fourth-generation Vercise Genus Deep Brain Stimulation (DBS) System, which can treat the symptoms of Parkinson's disease by delivering targeted electrical stimulation via surgically-implanted leads in the brain.

Boston Scientific 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.

To see the massive array of the company's products and

treatments, go to the company's website, bostonscientific.com and then to "Past Events" and click on the Investor Update at TCT 2020.

Stryker (SYK) announced in January that it acquired OrthoSensor, a leader in the digital care and sensor technology for total joint replacements.

This latest acquisition adds to Stryker's 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 continue to make strategic acquisitions.

The Best in Biotech ETFs

Biotech companies offer the most explosive profits because they are the source of the world's top breakthrough drugs. Their stocks are often volatile, making diversification essential. This can be accomplished by investing in a diversified electronically traded fund (ETF) investing exclusively in a portfolio of biotech companies.

We are recommending two top performers. Both of our selections have been strong and surpassed previous peak prices reached before the Coronavirus pandemic arrived. This relative strength underscores the vitality of the industry and these selections.

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. ARKG was our stellar performer in 2020, delivering a 178 percent profit.

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

Small caps and this fund are bound to continue to benefit from a shift to value as investors look for undiscovered bargains. Small caps are relatively small companies that 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.

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

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.

ETFs for Rising Bond Yields

The prospects of increasing inflation means that bond yields will rise from today’s historically low yields. The three ETFs listed below will benefit from rising long-term Treasury bond yields. They differ in the amount of leverage used. You can choose among them depending on your investment objectives and risk tolerance.

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

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

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

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

Historic Norms

We can see from the table below that historically since 1980, investors have demanded a real return (above the inflation rate) of close to 3 percent on long-term treasury bonds. That means 30-year treasury bonds should be yielding close to 5 percent with an inflation rate in the vicinity of 2 percent.

Historical Real Rates of Return

Years	30 Yr Note (Avg. Yield)	CPI Annual Increase	Real Rate
1980 - 2000	8.61	4.33	4.28
2000-04	5.70	2.60	3.10
2005-09	4.52	2.60	1.92
2010-14	3.57	2.00	1.57
2015-18	2.87	1.93	0.94
2019	2.58	1.81	0.77
2020	1.56	0.62	0.94
Average			2.98
Average Since 2000			1.79

If we only look at recent history, since 2000, which has been a low inflationary period, investors have demanded a lower real return of 1.8 percent. This would still put the yield on long-term treasury bonds close to 3.8 percent with an inflation rate in the vicinity of the Federal Reserve’s target of 2 percent.

The table below shows the approximate upside potential of our selected ETFs at the end of 2021 at various long-term Treasury bond yields. The first row shows today’s ETF prices at today’s long-term Treasury bond yields. Note that the approximate price of these ETFs would rise dramatically as Treasury bond yields rise.

Target Date	Bond Yields	ETF Prices		
		TBF	TBT	TMV
1/29/2021	1.84	16.28	17.58	59.86
12/31/2021	2.00	16.81	18.37	60.76
12/31/2021	3.80	21.08	27.60	107.92
12/31/2021	5.00	23.13	32.03	130.52

With long-term bond yields bouncing off historic lows, the downside of these ETFs is limited and the upside potential is significant, which provides an attractive risk/reward ratio.

The Erosion Factor

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, 0.03 percentage points (3 basis points) every day, and thus go nowhere. By the end of 2021, TMV would decline by 4.6 percent, TBT by 2.3 percent, and TBF by 0.7 percent. While not insignificant, this erosion factor is nominal in comparison to the price swings caused by a change in bond yields.

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) reported strong earnings in late January of \$1.68 per share, on revenue that was up 21 percent from one year ago. The stock’s muted reactions revealed that the good news was already anticipated. The high TTM price/earnings (P/E) ratio of 35 also reveals that the high stock price already anticipates high earnings growth ahead. If, for any reason, a high growth rate stumbles, the disappointment will send the stock price plunging. That is why we have a “hold” on AAPL. The stock price needs to retreat from peak levels to make AAPL a value proposition.

Earnings are projected to grow by 14 percent in 2021, bringing the per-share earnings to \$4.23. At our buying

target of \$100 per share, the TTM P/E would be 23.7, which is much more reasonable than the current TTM P/E of 35.

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

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

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

Intel (INTC) got a sharp boost in mid-January when it was announced that its CEO, Bob Swan will step down in February and that he will be replaced by Pat Gelsinger who is the current CEO of VMware. Mr. Gelsinger previously worked for Intel for several decades in various capacities, including its Chief Technology officer in the early 2000's. His leadership and recent success at VMware brings new expectations that some of Intel's technical production problems will be smoothed out, leading to growth in market share.

Intel reported very strong fourth quarter earnings in late January, making 2020 as Intel's fifth consecutive year of record revenue. The Client Computing Group, Data Center Group, Non-volatile Memory Solutions Group, and Mobileye all achieved record full-year revenue. In 2020, the company invested \$13.6 billion in research and development and \$14.3 billion in capital expenditures while focusing to strengthen its core CPU business, improve execution, and accelerate growth. Intel also raised its dividend by five percent to \$1.39 per share.

The company earned \$4.94 in 2020. The stock is trading close to a modest P/E ratio of 11. Such a low P/E is normally reserved for companies with poor growth prospects and weak balance sheets. That is not the case with Intel.

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.

Invesco (RHS) Portfolio of Consumer Staples

Company Name	Weight %
Church & Dwight Co Inc	3.34
McCormick & Co Inc Non-Voting	3.34
Walmart Inc	3.23
Conagra Brands Inc	3.23
Clorox Co	3.18
Monster Beverage Corp	3.18
Costco Wholesale Corp	3.15
The Kraft Heinz Co	3.15
Procter & Gamble Co	3.13
The Kroger Co	3.12
Philip Morris International Inc	3.09
General Mills Inc	3.08
Mondelez International	3.08
The Hershey Co	3.07
Hormel Foods Corp	3.07
Coca-Cola Co	3.06
Kimberly-Clark Corp	3.05
Kellogg Co	3.04
Altria Group Inc	3.04
PepsiCo Inc	3.03
Constellation Brands Inc A	3.02
Lamb Weston Holdings Inc	3.02
Campbell Soup Co	3.01
Archer-Daniels Midland Co	2.99
Brown-Forman Corp Class B	2.97
JM Smucker Co	2.95
The Estee Lauder Companies	2.93
Sysco Corp	2.92
Colgate-Palmolive Co	2.92
Walgreens Boots Alliance Inc	2.82
Tyson Foods Inc Class A	2.78
Molson Coors Beverage Co B	2.70
Coty Inc Class A	2.42

Estimations are that Intel will capture 40 percent of this market by the end of 2021.

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

International Business Machines (IBM) reported disappointing fourth quarter earnings in late January. After showing strong growth from its Cloud and Cognitive Software segment, sales declined by 4.5 percent. Despite the fourth quarter earnings disappointment, the financial strength of the company continues to make the per share \$6.52 dividend solid, for an attractive yield of more than 5 percent.

IBM's Hybrid Cloud and Artificial Intelligence (AI) are long-term sources of growth, bolstered by its super-computer it calls "Watson", which can "think" like a human. The hybrid cloud market is expected to grow by at least 20 percent annually for the foreseeable future.

JP Morgan Chase (JPM) reported strong earnings in January for the fourth quarter, continuing to set the standard as a well-managed bank with a high return on equity. In December, the Federal Reserve announced that it is satisfied with the company's financial strength to allow JPM to resume share buybacks in the first quarter of 2021. JPM plans to buy back \$3.2 billion worth of stock during the first quarter of 2021.

In 2020, JPM took substantial (GAAP) loan loss charges in the first three quarters to account for potential future losses. This means that future negative events have been largely accounted for, making future results more likely to be positive.

Over the longer term, JPM will benefit strongly from an economic recovery which typically steepens the yield curve as long-term bond and mortgage yields rise faster than short-term interest rates. As today's exceedingly flat yield curve becomes steeper, profit margins for banks will become substantially more profitable.

NCR Corp (NCR) makes automatic tellers (ATMs), retail point-of-sale (POS) workstations, self-service kiosks, and other self-service checkout systems. Prior to the Covid pandemic, 485 million people used NCR products every day. Of course, the Covid crisis scared shoppers as well as stockholders.

Even during the last year, NCR earned \$3.54 per share. Based on those normalized earnings, the current price of this stock is incredibly cheap. The TTM earnings are now \$3.39. The stock is still cheap with a P/E close to 10 which assumes no growth. As economies open up in the US and around the world, NCR is bound to see substantial growth.

Valero Energy (VLO) is diversifying from purely an oil refiner to a "green" company through its joint-venture with Diamond Green Diesel, which is producing renewable diesel at large profit 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.

Meanwhile, Valero has the unique flexibility to refine substantial quantities of a variety of crude oil types. Low oil prices add profits 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 portions of the petroleum market, including OPEC nations, Russia, and US frackers.

The company also has access to the US pipeline network for delivery to its gulf coast locations. This flexibility and access allows Valero 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 (low sulfur) or heavy sour (high sulfur), and receive the best discounts for its feedstocks.

The company expects demand for refined products to gradually pick up during the second quarter and reach near-normal levels in the third quarter. For that reason, management has been maintaining the dividend which annualizes for \$3.92, which is still above 6.5 percent.

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	\$18.58	0.00%	BUY	\$21.00
International Business Machines	IBM	\$119.11	5.47%	BUY	\$125.07
RLJ Lodging Trust - Preferred A *	RLJPRA	\$25.74	7.58%	BUY	\$26.50
RPT Realty 7.25% Preferred D *	RPTPRD	\$52.24	6.94%	BUY	\$50.00
Valero	VLO	\$56.43	6.95%	BUY	\$59.25
Growth with Moderate Income					
Intel	INTC	\$55.51	2.50%	BUY	\$58.29
Invesco Basic Materials ETF	RTM	\$137.89	1.59%	BUY	\$145.00
Invesco Consumer Staples ETF	RHS	\$147.94	2.18%	BUY	\$155.34
JP Morgan Chase	JPM	\$128.67	2.80%	BUY	\$135.10
Growth					
Apple	AAPL	\$131.96	0.62%	HOLD	\$100.00
Boston Scientific	BSX	\$35.44	0.00%	BUY	\$37.21
Genomic Revolution Multi-Sector	ARKG	\$101.93	0.00%	BUY	\$107.03
NCR Corp	NCR	\$33.36	0.00%	BUY	\$35.03
Stryker Corp	SYK	\$221.01	1.04%	BUY	\$232.06
Third Avenue Real Estate Value Investor *	TVRVX	\$22.79	0.00%	BUY	\$24.00
Third Avenue Small-Cap Value Investor Fund *	TVSVX	\$17.35	0.00%	BUY	\$18.50
Virtus LifeSci Biotech Products	BBP	\$56.46	0.00%	BUY	\$59.28
ETFs for Rising Bond Yields					
Direxion Daily 20+Treasury Bear Shares 3X Leverage	TMV	\$59.86	0.00%	BUY	\$62.85
Proshares Short 20+Treasury - 2X Leverage	TBT	\$17.58	0.00%	BUY	\$18.46
Proshares Short 20+Treasury - No Leverage	TBF	\$16.28	0.00%	BUY	\$17.09
Hedges					
S&P 500 ProShares Ultra Short ETF	SDS	\$12.56	0.00%	BUY	\$13.19

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

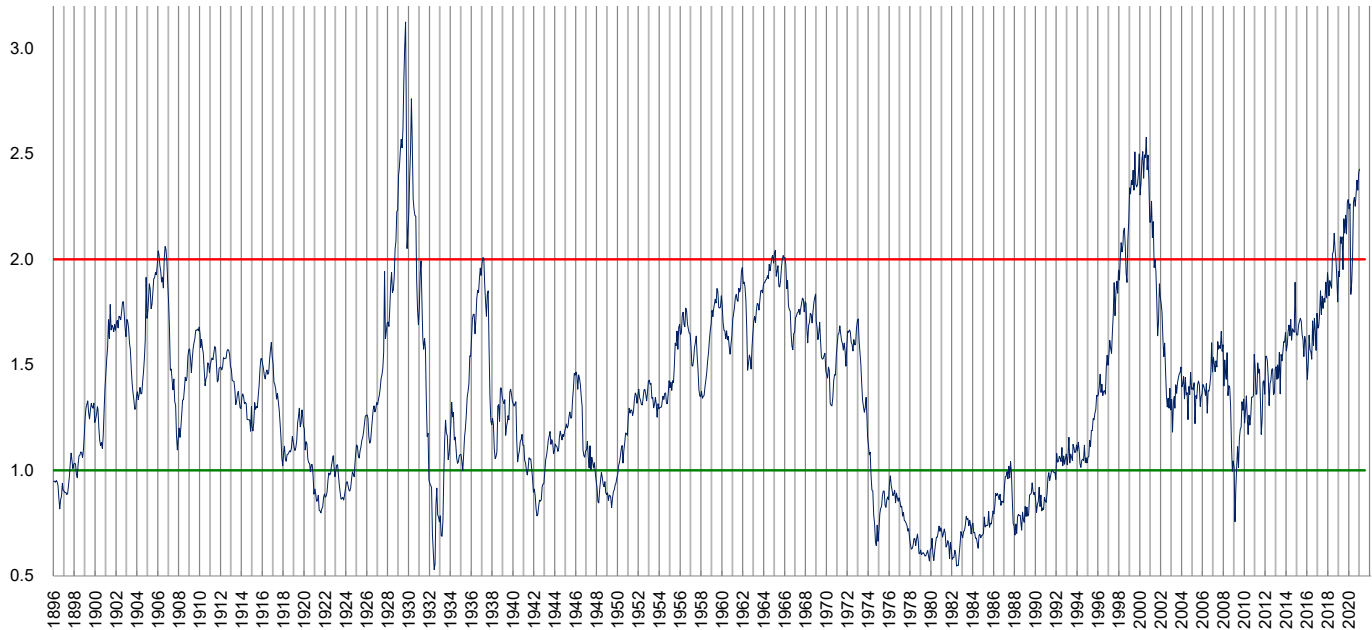
* It is not possible to offer live pricing.

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 \$577 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 \$343,900 in November (the latest data) and with the S&P 500 at 3700, the Sound Advice Risk Indicator reads 2.43, 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%		5.5%

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.

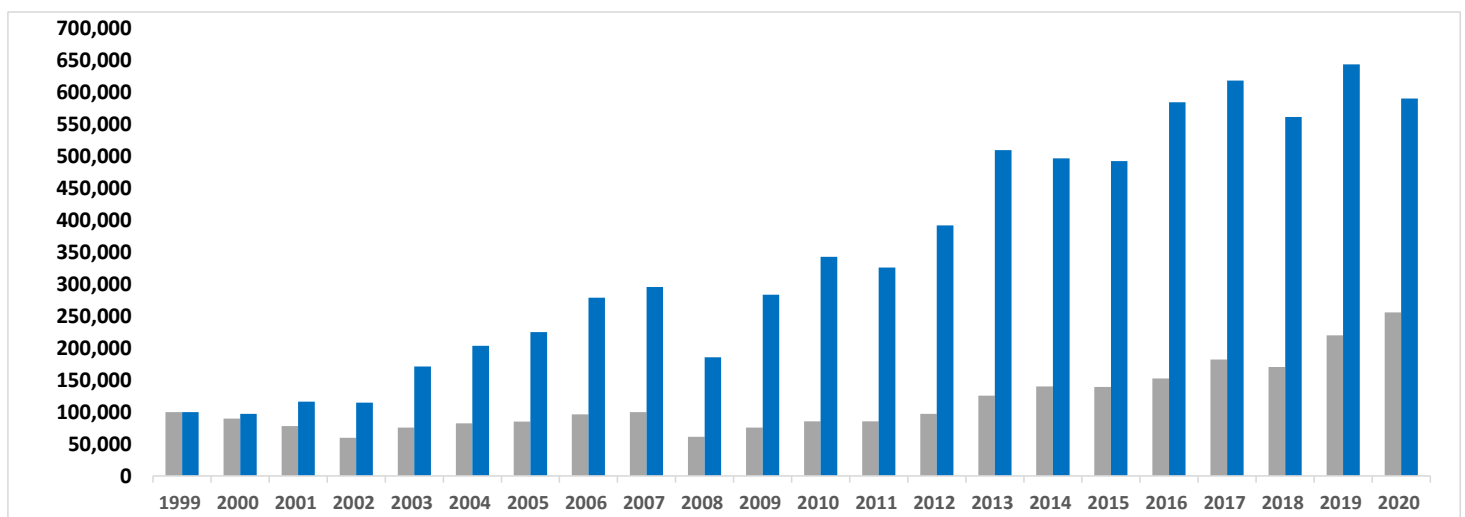
The **Sound Advice Diffusion Index of LAGGING Indicators** gives “Caution” signals when all three of its individual lagging economic indicators rise above their respective levels of six months earlier, providing a 100 percent reading. This reading reveals that the US economy is strong enough to put upward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

Current Status

The Diffusion Index of LAGGING Indicators has been in caution mode. **The latest data for December (reported in late January) caused a 67 percent reading.**

Our next signal will come from the Diffusion Index of LEADING Indicators, when it drops to zero. **The latest reading for December was 100 percent.** We remain in Caution mode until the Diffusion Index of LEADING Indicators drops to zero.

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 \$255,682, versus \$590,204 if it was invested in the *Sound Advice* recommendations (in blue).