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DISCIPLINED WEALTH MANAGEMENT

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September 2023: Fall's cooler temps are around the corner - is the stock market cooling off too?

Market Update
(all values as of 08.31.2023)

Stock Indices:

Dow Jones	34,721
S&P 500	4,507
Nasdaq	14,034

Bond Sector Yields:

2 Yr Treasury	4.85%
10 Yr Treasury	4.09%
10 Yr Municipal	2.87%
High Yield	8.27%

YTD Market Returns:

Dow Jones	4.75%
S&P 500	17.40%
Nasdaq	34.09%
MSCI-EAFE	8.50%
MSCI-Europe	9.83%
MSCI-Pacific	6.17%
MSCI-Emg Mkt	2.50%
US Agg Bond	1.37%
US Corp Bond	2.76%
US Gov't Bond	1.53%

Commodity Prices:

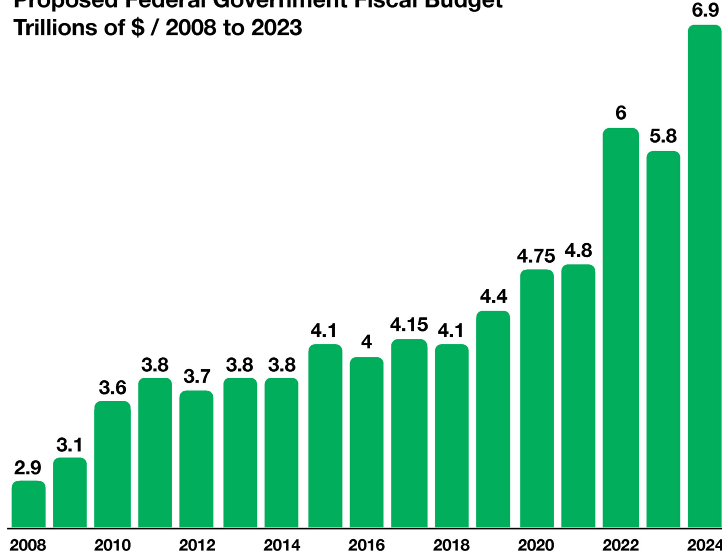
Gold	1,966
Silver	24.82
Oil (WTI)	83.60

Currencies:

Dollar / Euro	1.08
Dollar / Pound	1.26
Yen / Dollar	146.14
Canadian /Dollar	0.73

Macro Overview

Congress is spending the bulk of September deliberating over the Federal Budget for fiscal year 2024 as a looming deadline on September 30th approaches. Should an agreement not be reached, a government shutdown could occur. The $6.9 trillion proposed budget encompasses 438 agencies and 15 executive branches of the Federal Government.



The last Federal Government shutdown lasted 35 days, from Dec. 22nd, 2018, until Jan. 25th, 2019, making it the longest Federal Government shutdown in history. Hardline republicans may dig their heels in during the deliberations – adding additional market volatility this month.

The 30-year fixed mortgage rate fell to 7.18% in August, after reaching a 23-year high of 7.23%. The housing market resiliency has been questioned by many analysts and economists, as elevated home prices continue to make purchases unaffordable for millions of Americans. Apartment and residential rental costs are starting to decline in various areas of the country. These trends positively impact the "rents" component of the government's CPI gauge (consumer price index) – further evidence that we have entered a welcomed disinflationary environment.

Equities retracted in August as earnings estimates and lingering inflation concerns held stocks back. Supply constraints that existed a year ago have essentially vanished, yet have led many companies to explore new sourcing locations and domestic facilities. China, the world's largest exporting country, is showing signs of a possible economic contraction, whose silver-lining is the exportation of deflationary prices to the US.

Petroleum production cuts by OPEC and other oil-producing countries propelled oil and gasoline prices higher in August – which will likely add upward pressure to the August 13th inflation report = potentially adding downside pressure to the overall stock market. Other factors affecting oil prices as fall approaches include seasonality, demand, and supply constraints. Oil ended August at $83.60 per barrel, yet still lower than the recent highs of over $120 per barrel in June 2022.

Consumer Rates Remain Elevated – Fixed Income Overview

Interest rates experienced some volatility in August due to uncertainty surrounding inflationary pressures and intended Fed policy. Elevated rates on consumer loans such as credit cards and mortgages continued to place pressure on shoppers and home buyers.

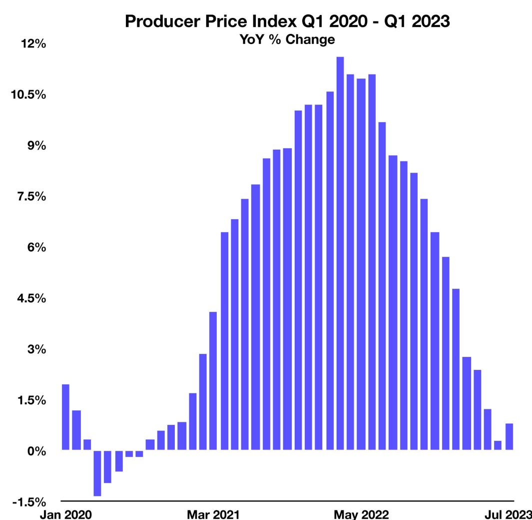
The yield on the 10-year Treasury bond closed the month at 4.09% after reaching 4.34% in August. The average rate on a fixed 30-year mortgage fell to 7.18% in late August, down from 7.23% earlier in the month. Rates this same time a year ago averaged 5.66% on a 30-year fixed mortgage. Some analysts believe that rates may have started to change course, as the Fed ponders potentially holding back from further rate increases.

Pullback In August Affects Equity Indices – Domestic & International Equity Update

Domestic stocks experienced a retraction in August as future earnings came into focus along with lingering inflationary pressures on company expenses. The S&P 500 fell -1.6%, culminating in the second monthly decline so far in 2023. The Dow Jones Industrial Index as well as the Nasdaq declined with similar pullbacks. September has historically been a volatile month for the indices as uncertainty before the year end and government fiscal mayhem have hindered equity performance. September is the Rodney Dangerfield of the 12 months; it gets no respect because it has been the worst month for stocks on average since 1928 . However, it has been up 45% of the time since then with a solid average gain of 3.2%. Even if the market is down this month, September is a good month for picking apples and it could be a good month for picking depressed stocks too.

The market's performance this month will probably depend on August's CPI report, which will be released Wednesday, September 13. That will probably determine whether the 10-year Treasury bond yield continues to trade below 4.25% and whether the FOMC decides to hike or not on September 20.

Producer Prices Heading Lower, What It Means – Producer Inflation



The Producer Price Index (PPI) measures the selling prices domestic companies receive when purchasing everything from raw materials to products themselves. Similar to how the Consumer Price Index (CPI) tracks prices consumers pay for goods, the PPI tracks prices that corporations pay.

With the PPI steadily decreasing to its lowest growth rate since 2020, corporations are now forced to pay far less for commodities than previously. This affects companies across a wide variety of industries and is a leading indicator of what may soon trickle down to CPI. With companies paying lower prices, consumer prices have historically followed and continue their downward path as has been exemplified in recent months.

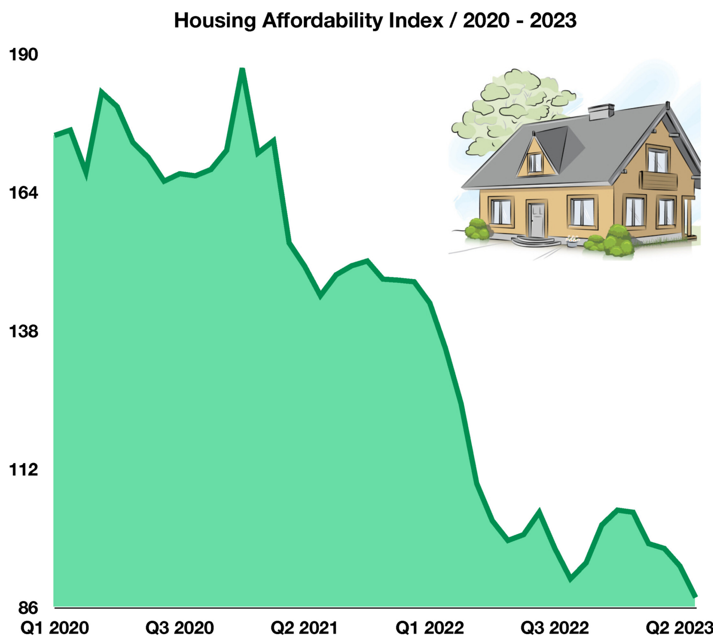
Sources: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis

30-YEAR MORTGAGE RATES FELL TO 2.65% IN 2021, THE LOWEST IN HISTORY

Housing Market Is Among The Least Affordable In U.S. History – Housing Market

Measured by the Housing Affordability Index, the affordability of homes has been steadily eroding since early 2021. Factors affecting affordability include home prices, mortgage rates, and household incomes. With historic inflation outpacing income growth, home buyers in the U.S. have been unable to keep up with rising prices and mortgage rates.

When the Fed increases interest rates to combat inflation, mortgage rates are similarly affected. The average 30-year mortgage rate rose to a high of 7.24%, the highest since 2001. This is a significant difference to the lows reached in 2021 when the average 30-year mortgage fell to 2.65% mortgages, the lowest in U.S. history. This creates a less affordable environment for home buyers and harms potential buyers' abilities to acquire property.



First-time buyers are forced to either buy a home knowing they may not be able to afford it or continue renting until affordability rises. For those who already own a home, remaining in their current house instead of buying a new one has been increasing in popularity as well. (Sources: National Association of Realtors, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, Freddie Mac)

How Deflation & Inflation Affect High Income & Low Income Earners – Inflation Review

As inflation has taken center stage over the past year, consumers among all demographics have been affected in various ways. Consumers know inflation as the overall increase in the cost of goods and services, from shoes to gasoline. However, products that are essential for everyday life can be more costly for some than others, such as food, healthcare, and toilet paper. These products usually make up a larger portion of expenses for lower-income consumers and less for higher-income earners. In essence, inflation can be much more of a challenge for lower-income earners as less disposable income is left for more desirable items.

Fortunately, consumers have the ability to control what they buy when inflation sets in, such as buying hamburgers instead of steak. This is where consumer choice is critical as to where the economy is heading and what companies might benefit more than others.

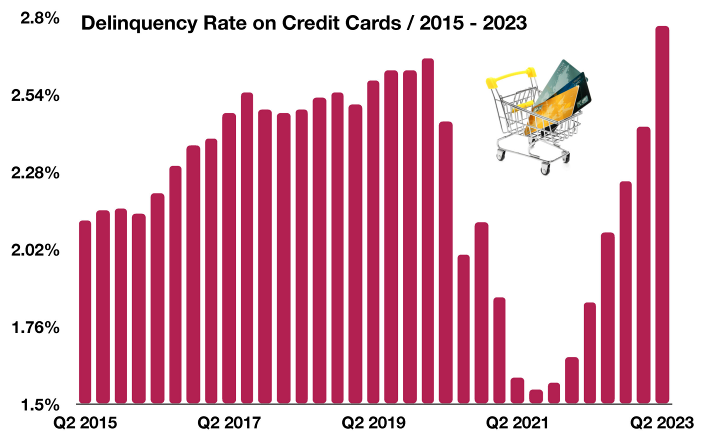
As the economy slows and lower prices eventually settle in, a deflationary environment evolves pulling certain asset prices down. Historically, lower asset prices affect higher income earners with assets, rather than those with little or no assets. Deflation may affect the prices of assets such as homes, cars, stocks, and commodities.(Sources: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, OneBlueWindow Editorial Staff)

CREDIT CARD DELINQUENCY RATES REACHED THEIR HIGHEST LEVEL IN OVER A DECADE

Delinquency Rates On The Rise – Consumer Finance

A survey released by the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas found that overall credit and lending activity is deteriorating nationwide. The survey encompasses loan activity among larger banks, regional banks, finance companies, and various lenders.

The primary concern of this report centers around rising delinquency rates on credit cards, which indicates ongoing trends pertaining to consumer behavior. Consumers have become more accustomed to taking on debt, which declined during the pandemic. However, consumers are now financing an increasingly high level of purchases, which has also driven up rates of delinquency.



This is of particular interest to economists, who view this dynamic as a worrying sign for consumer spending. In 2023, credit card delinquency rates reached their highest level in over a decade, surpassing levels last seen in late 2012. When consumers increasingly take on debt which they are unable to pay back, it creates a delinquency cycle that poses financial duress for consumers. Delinquency rates fell substantially in 2021 as pandemic assistance funds helped alleviate the debt burden of millions of credit card holders, yet catapulted back up once those funds were exhausted.(Sources: Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas)

New Mortgage Rules To Accommodate Lower Credit Scores – Lending Overview

New mortgage rules are attempting to make homes more accessible to home buyers with low credit scores by lowering the fees for low-credit buyers while, in some cases, raising the fees for high-credit buyers. This new fee restructuring revolves around what Fannie Mae calls "loan level price adjustment costs" and what Freddie Mac refers to as "credit fees". Wealth redistribution...hmm? Having become effective on May 1, these two agencies increased their risk-based fees, which are intended to protect the agencies from borrowers deemed as more likely to default on their payments. However, in an attempt to make homes more affordable for individuals without large savings, their adjustments instead lowered fees for purchasers with smaller down payments. On a conventional mortgage, borrowers who now put down payments between 5% and 25%, which are considered larger down payments, will pay more in fees than those who put down less than 5% of the home's value. Thus, the higher fees are impacting those who are considered less risky. While purchasers with high credit scores will still be charged lower fees than purchasers with low credit scores, the disparity between fees will be reduced. This is intended to offset the risks of supporting purchasers with riskier credit, whom Fannie Mae claims may not have large savings or help from family or friends like their peers with higher credit scores.(Sources: Freddie Mac, Fannie Mae)

Market Returns: All data is indicative of total return which includes capital gain/loss and reinvested dividends for noted period. Index data sources; MSCI, DJ-UBSCI, WTI, IDC, S&P. The information provided is believed to be reliable, but its accuracy or completeness is not warranted. This material is not intended as an offer or solicitation for the purchase or sale of any stock, bond, mutual fund, or any other financial instrument. The views and strategies discussed herein may not be appropriate and/or suitable for all investors. This material is meant solely for informational purposes, and is not intended to suffice as any type of accounting, legal, tax, or estate planning advice. Any and all forecasts mentioned are for illustrative purposes only and should not be interpreted as investment recommendations.