

THE PLANNING GROUP

A Wealth Management Firm

Weekly Commentary May 3, 2010

The Markets

Two tragedies, worlds apart, reached a boil last week and affected the financial markets in a not so pleasant way:

Greece nearly imploded last week on fears that its government was bankrupt. With huge budget deficits and no credible way to pay them, Greece saw its short-term government bond yields soar past 20%. In contrast, the comparable bond in the U.S. yielded about 1% last week. As a European Union country, Greece has limited tools to deal with the crisis on its own (e.g., it cannot devalue its currency or adjust its interest rates) so it has to rely on the kindness of neighbors to bail it out. This past weekend, the EU and the International Monetary Fund announced they will support Greece with a \$146 billion multi-year aid package. Now comes the hard part for Greece (think of the strikes and riots already taking place) - implementing the austerity measures which accompany the bailout. The concern that this debt problem could spread and undermine the EU countries undercut many world stock markets last week.

Closer to home, the uncapped oil leak in the Gulf of Mexico has states bordering the Gulf bracing for an environmental and economic disaster. The Gulf is a major oil-producing region and this spill could deter new drilling, a thought which helped send oil prices up more than 1% last week. Unfortunately, fishermen, the tourism industry, and the environment itself all stand to lose as the spill worsens.

While the twin tragedies captured many of the headlines last week, much of the economic news was bullish. For example, first quarter gross domestic product grew at a respectable 3.2 percent annual rate, household spending increased at the fastest rate in three years, and The Institute for Supply Management-Chicago Inc. said its business barometer rose to 63.8 in April, the highest level in five years. On top of that, *The Economist* magazine said, "global output is now back to where it was before the downturn ... (and) there is growing optimism that the recovery is becoming self-sustaining."

Data as of 4/30/10	1-Week	Y-T-D	1-Year	3-Year	5-Year	10-Year
Standard & Poor's 500 (Domestic Stocks)	-2.5%	6.4%	35.2%	-7.1%	0.4%	-2.1%
DJ Global ex US (Foreign Stocks)	-1.4	1.0	39.5	-8.1	4.2	1.3
10-year Treasury Note (Yield Only)	3.7	N/A	3.1	4.6	4.2	6.3
Gold (per ounce)	3.5	6.8	33.5	20.3	22.0	15.7
DJ-UBS Commodity Index	-1.0	-3.2	21.8	-8.0	-2.5	3.2
DJ Equity All REIT TR Index	-1.2	17.5	68.6	-8.4	4.3	11.6

Notes: S&P 500, DJ Global ex US, Gold, DJ-UBS Commodity Index returns exclude reinvested dividends (gold does not pay a dividend) and the three-, five-, and 10-year returns are annualized; the DJ Equity All REIT TR Index does include reinvested dividends and the three-, five-, and 10-year returns are annualized; and the 10-year Treasury Note is simply the yield at the close of the day on each of the historical time periods.

Sources: Yahoo! Finance, Barron's, djindexes.com, London Bullion Market Association.

Past performance is no guarantee of future results. Indices are unmanaged and cannot be invested into directly. N/A means not applicable or not available.

"EVEN AFTER THE BIGGEST RALLY SINCE THE 1930s, U.S. stocks remain the cheapest in two decades as the economy improves," according to an April 26 Bloomberg story. How can that be? Well, digging into the numbers a bit, it appears the statement comes with some qualifiers. First, the "cheapness" is based on the price to earnings ratio (P/E) using *forecasted* earnings estimates. By that measure, the S&P 500 is trading at 14.1 times forecasted earnings. As you know, forecasts may or may not come true so, if earnings actually fall short of the projection, then today's P/E will be higher in retrospect.

However, in the same article, Bloomberg points to another market valuation measure that says the market is significantly *overvalued*. Using the 10-year average corporate earnings model popularized by Yale economist Robert J. Shiller, the P/E on the S&P 500 is currently about 22, which is well above the historical average of 16.

Bulls will point to the P/E using forecasted earnings estimates and say stocks are cheap. Bears will point to the Shiller calculation and say stocks are overpriced. Regardless of which view is ultimately correct, we stay focused on helping you reach *your* goals and *your* objectives for the future.

The Economy⁷

The good news is the GDP (gross national product) is growing. The bad news is that it is slowing primarily centered around the issue that businesses are still not confident in the demand from consumers. Unemployment is still quite high, and is expected to have only stubbornly slow improvement.

It is now anticipated that the economy will not get much better until early 2011, although the stock market may perform better than expected, especially with all the money sitting on the sidelines. The drop in the market last week, despite the show of reasonably good earnings, seemed to be more politically driven with the Goldman Sachs issues, and there is probably more of that to come.

The Fed's short-term interest rates remained unchanged, and most are now anticipating early 2011 before we see an increase. The price of oil moved higher, perhaps some reflection on the continuing oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico.

Financial Tidbit⁸

Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke says retiring baby boomers may break the budget by putting unprecedented demands on the Medicare and Social Security systems. The Fed chief says the U.S. is on a path of unsustainable spending being made worse by these programs, and that the government-run entities could exhaust funds before 2050. "Unless we, as a nation, demonstrate a strong commitment to fiscal responsibility, in the longer run we will have neither financial stability nor healthy economic growth."

In eight years, the number of people with no income tax liability increased by 59%, from 32.6 million in 2000 to 51.6 million in 2008. Currently 47% of U.S. households pay no income tax.

In the past we have had a symbiotic relationship between free enterprise and government, but there is a "tipping point" when symbiotic becomes parasitic. We may not be there yet, but you really have to think we may be approaching a bridge too far to cross:

1. Government workers are averaging nearly \$100,000 per year, while their free enterprise counterparts are making less than \$50,000.
2. Every citizen in our country has a \$350,000 unfunded liability for just Social Security, prescription drugs, and Medicare.

3. Virtually every municipal, state and federal retirement and retiree health plan is grossly underfunded.

Weekly Focus – A Riddle

Two fathers and two sons went fishing one day. They were there the whole day and only caught three fish. One father said, that is enough for all of us, we will have one each.

How can this be possible?

(See below for the answer and send us an e-mail to let us know if you got it right. Good luck!)

Best regards,

The Planning Group Investment Team

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* Consult your financial professional before making any investment decision. You cannot invest directly in an index. Past performance does not guarantee future results. Opinions expressed are subject to change without notice and are not intended as investment advice or to predict future performance.

* The Standard & Poor's 500 (S&P 500) is an unmanaged group of securities considered to be representative of the stock market in general. The DJ Global ex US is an unmanaged group of non-U.S. securities designed to reflect the performance of the global equity securities that have readily available prices. The 10-year Treasury Note represents debt owed by the United States Treasury to the public. Since the U.S. Government is seen as a risk-free borrower, investors use the 10-year Treasury Note as a benchmark for the long-term bond market. Gold represents the London afternoon gold price fix as reported by the London Bullion Market Association. The DJ Commodity Index is designed to be a highly liquid and diversified benchmark for the commodity futures market. The Index is composed of futures contracts on 19 physical commodities and was launched on July 14, 1998. The DJ Equity All REIT TR Index measures the total return performance of the equity subcategory of the Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT) industry as calculated by Dow Jones. ⁷ The source for the information for On The Economy was derived from Bob LeClair's *Finance & Markets Newsletter* 5/2/10. ⁸ In addition, information was derived from *The Virtual Advisor* 4/15/10

* Yahoo! Finance is the source for any reference to the performance of an index between two specific periods.

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Answer to the Riddle: There was the father, his son, and his son's son. This equals two fathers and two sons. (Source: Riddles.com)