Okun's Observations

Open. Observant. Objective

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Dear VIP Client,

WOW! Have we all figured out the "New normal for now" yet? Our group and families are sure working on it as i am sure yours are as well. It has been a trying time for all of us. Thank goodness for our health. Thank goodness for our family. Thank goodness for all of you. We are here for you. We hope you find the news herewith helpful and informative.

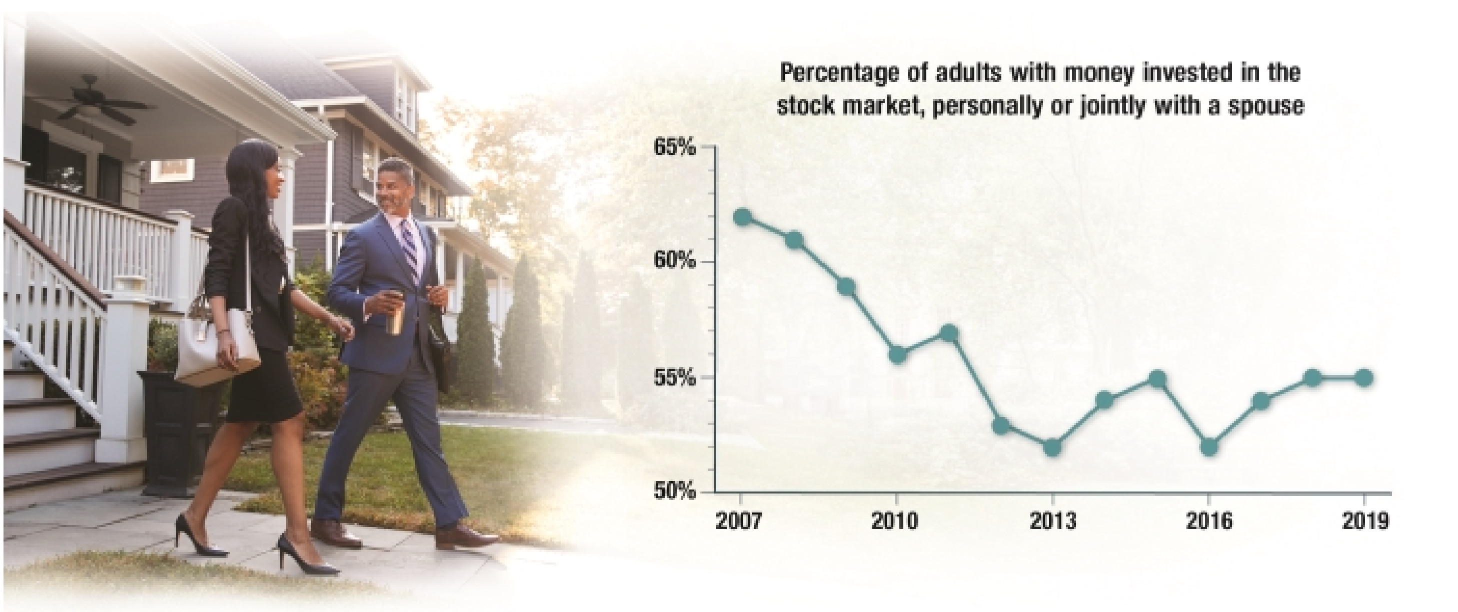
Let us know how we can help. Our operations are now remote, but our messages come to our email immediately. We are also available on email and cell phones.

Please be safe, careful and well. Let's get better in 2020! See you soon, we hope.

Kathie Okun and your OFG team!

Stock Ownership Slow to Recover

Fifty-five percent of Americans said that they (and/or a spouse) had money invested in the stock market in 2019, the same as in 2018. Stock ownership still lags pre-recession levels, suggesting that caution remains despite a decade of strong market recovery.



Source: Gallup, 2019

Keeping Cool: Investment Strategy vs. Reaction

After losing ground in 2018, U.S. stocks had a banner year in 2019, with the S&P 500 gaining almost 29% — the highest annual increase since 2013.[1] It's too early to know how 2020 will turn out, but it's been rocky so far, and you can count on market swings to challenge your patience as an investor.

The trend was steadily upward last year, but there were downturns along the way, including a single-day drop of almost 3% on August 14. That plunge began with bad economic news from Germany and China that triggered a flight to the relative safety of U.S. Treasury securities, driving the yield on the 10-year Treasury note below the 2-year note for the first time since 2007. A yield curve inversion has been a reliable predictor of past recessions and spooked the stock market.[2] By the following day, however, the market was back on the rise.[3]

It's possible that a yield curve inversion may no longer be a precursor to a recession. Still, larger concerns about the economy are ongoing, and this incident illustrates the pitfalls of overreacting to economic news. If you were also spooked on August 14, 2019, and sold some or all of your stock positions, you might have missed out on more than 13% equity market growth over the rest of the year.[4]

Tune Out the Noise

The media generates news 24 hours a day, seven days a week. You can check the market and access the news anywhere you carry a mobile device. This barrage of information might make you feel that you should buy or sell investments in response to the latest news, whether it's a market drop or an unexpected geopolitical event. This is a natural response, but it's not wise to react emotionally to market swings or to news that you think might affect the market.

Stay the Course

Consider this advice from John Bogle, famed investor and mutual fund industry pioneer: "Stay the course. Regardless of what happens to the markets, stick to your investment program. Changing your strategy at the wrong time can be the single most devastating mistake you can make as an investor."[5]

This doesn't mean you should never buy or sell investments. However, the investments you buy and sell should be based on a sound strategy appropriate for your risk tolerance, financial goals, and time frame. And a sound investment strategy should carry you through market ups and downs.

It can be tough to keep cool when you see the market dropping or to control your exuberance when you see it shooting upward. But overreacting to market movements or trying to "time the market" by guessing at future direction may create additional risk that could negatively affect your long-term portfolio performance.

All investments are subject to market fluctuation, risk, and loss of principal. When sold, investments may be worth more or less than their original cost. U.S. Treasury securities are guaranteed by the federal government as to the timely payment of principal and interest. If not held to maturity, they could be worth more or less than the original amount paid.

1) S&P Dow Jones Indices, 2020

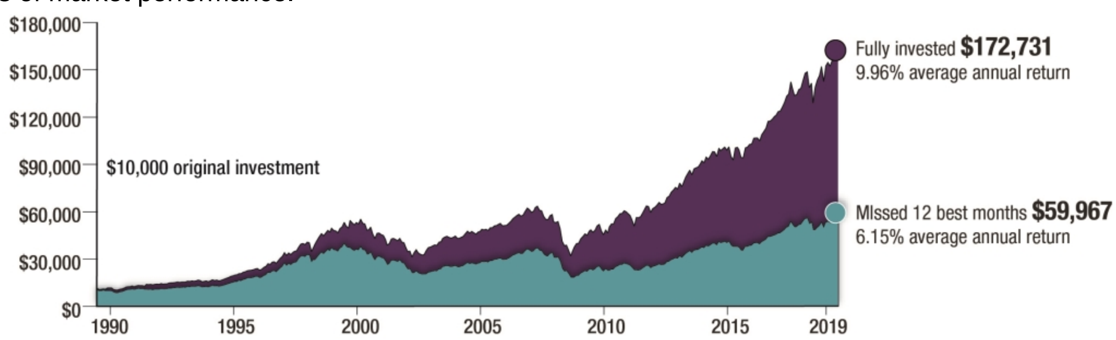
2) *The Wall Street Journal,* August 14, 2019

3-4) Yahoo! Finance (S&P 500 index for the period 8/14/2019 to 12/31/2019)

5) MarketWatch, June 6, 2017

Long-Term Commitment

"Time in the market" is generally more effective than trying to time the market. An investor who remained fully invested in the U.S. stock market over the past 30 years would have received almost triple the return of an investor who missed the best 12 months of market performance.



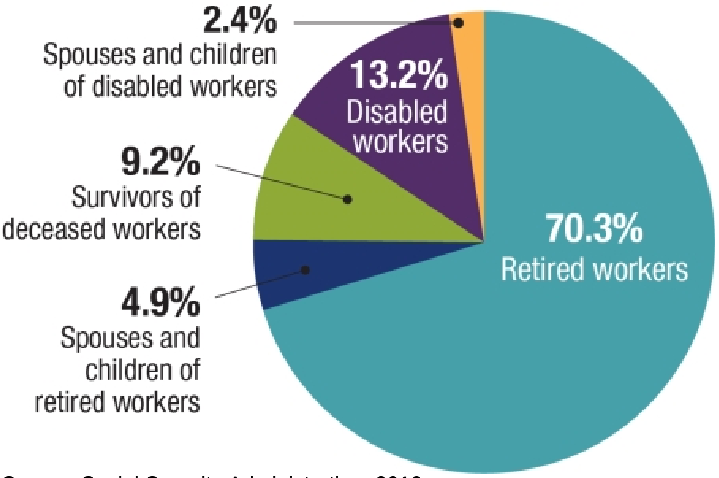
Source: Refinitiv, 2020, S&P 500 Composite Total Return Index for the period 12/31/1989 to 12/31/2019. The S&P 500 is an unmanaged group of securities that is considered to be representative of the U.S. stock market in general. The performance of an unmanaged index is not indicative of the performance of any specific investment. Individuals cannot invest directly in an index. This hypothetical example is used for illustrative purposes only and does not consider the impact of taxes, investment fees, or expenses. Rates of return will vary over time, particularly for long-term investments. Actual results will vary. Past performance does not guarantee future results.

Social Security May Offer a Lifetime of Protection

Social Security is much more than a retirement program. Most Americans are protected by the Old-Age, Survivors, and Disability Insurance (OASDI) program — the official name of Social Security — from birth through old age. Here are four times in your life when Social Security might matter to you or the people you care about.

A Wide Safety Net

Current Social Security beneficiaries



Source: Social Security Administration, 2019

When You Start Your Career

Your first experience with Social Security might be noticing that your paycheck is smaller than you expected due to FICA (Federal Insurance Contributions Act) taxes. Most jobs are covered by Social Security, and your employer is required to withhold payroll taxes to help fund Social Security and Medicare.

Although no one likes to pay taxes, when you work and pay FICA taxes, you earn Social Security credits, which enable you (and your eligible family members) to qualify for Social Security retirement, disability, and survivor benefits. Most people need 40 credits (10 years of work) to be eligible for Social Security retirement benefits, but fewer credits may be needed to receive disability benefits or for family members to receive survivor benefits.

If You Become Disabled

Disability can strike anyone at any time. Research shows that one in four of today's 20-year-olds will become disabled before reaching full retirement age.[1]

Social Security disability benefits can replace part of your income if you have a severe physical or mental impairment that prevents you from working. Your disability generally must be expected to last at least a year or result in death.

When You Marry…or Divorce

Married couples may be eligible for Social Security benefits based on their own earnings or on a spouse's earnings.

When you receive or are eligible for retirement or disability benefits, your spouse who is age 62 or older may also be able to receive benefits based on your earnings if you've been married at least a year. A younger spouse may be able to receive benefits if he or she is caring for a child under age 16 or disabled before age 22 who is receiving benefits based on your earnings.

If you were to die, your spouse may be eligible for survivor benefits based on your earnings. Regardless of age, your spouse who has not remarried may receive benefits if caring for your child who is under age 16 or disabled before age 22 and entitled to receive benefits based on your earnings. At age 60 or older (50 or older if disabled), your spouse may be able to receive a survivor benefit even if not caring for a child.

If you divorce and your marriage lasted at least 10 years, your former unmarried spouse may be entitled to retirement, disability, or survivor benefits based on your earnings.

When You Welcome a Child

Your child may be eligible for Social Security if you are receiving retirement or disability benefits, and may receive survivor benefits in the event of your death. In fact, according to the Social Security Administration, 98% of children could get benefits if a working parent dies.[2] Your child must be unmarried and under age 18 (19 if a full-time student) or age 18 or older with a disability that began before age 22.

In certain cases, grandchildren and stepchildren may also be eligible for benefits based on your earnings.

Know the Rules

To receive any type of Social Security benefit, you must meet specific eligibility requirements, only some of which are covered here. For more information, visit ssa.gov.

1-2) Social Security Administration, 2019

Where to Look for Lost Property

U.S. savings bonds were once so popular (and so often tucked away) that an estimated $25 billion in matured savings bonds have never been claimed. These bonds have been caught in a legal battle between the federal government and states that want to take control of the bonds on behalf of residents.[1]

In August 2019, a federal appeals court ruled in favor of the federal government, saying that only the rightful owner could redeem bonds that were missing, stolen, or destroyed (typically by providing serial numbers). However, the Treasury has allowed states to redeem bonds in their physical possession and hold the proceeds for their rightful owner.[2] As this conflict illustrates, one of the challenges of finding lost property is knowing where to look.

State Programs

Every state has an unclaimed property program that requires companies and financial institutions to turn account assets over to the state if they have lost contact with the rightful owner for one year or longer. The state is then responsible for locating the owner.

For state programs, unclaimed property might include financial accounts, stocks, uncashed dividend and payroll checks, utility deposits, insurance payments and policies, trust distributions, mineral royalty payments, and the contents of safe-deposit boxes. State-held property generally can be claimed in perpetuity by original owners and heirs.

Most states participate in a national database called Missing Money; searching on MissingMoney.com is free. You might also need to check specific databases for every state where you have lived. For more information, see the National Association of Unclaimed Property Administrators at unclaimed.org.

Federal Programs

Unclaimed property held by federal agencies might include tax refunds, pension funds, funds from failed banks and credit unions, funds owed investors from U.S. SEC enforcement cases, refunds from FHA-insured mortgages, and unredeemed savings bonds that are no longer earning interest. There is no central database for federal agencies, but you can find more information at usa.gov/unclaimed-money.

Proceed with Care

Finding and receiving unclaimed property to which you are entitled should not cost you money. Though there are legitimate companies that may be paid to locate or offer to help rightful owners obtain property for a fee, you do not need to pay them in order to receive the property. Be on the lookout for scammers who claim to have property in order to obtain other information about you or your finances. If you have questions, contact your state's unclaimed property office.

1-2) *The Wall Street Journal,* August 3 and August 13, 2019
