YOUR FINANCIAL FUTURE

Your Guide to Life Planning

January 2018

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In This Issue

Key Takeaways

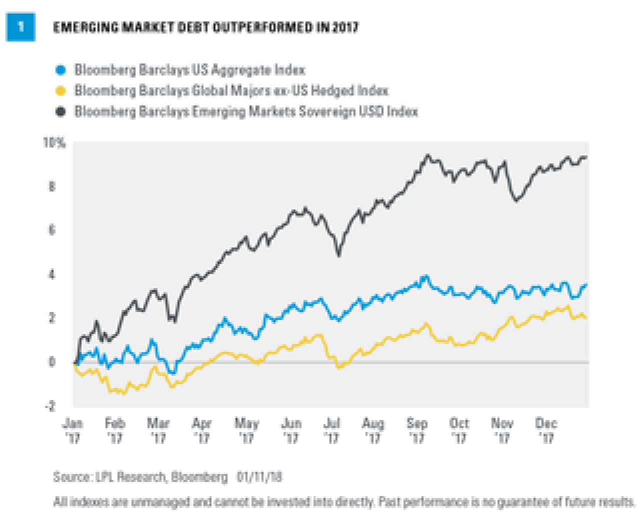
- Dollar weakness in 2017 helped propel unhedged foreign developed bonds and U.S. dollar-denominated EMD to strong performance.
- Rising rates, continued economic growth, and potential moderate U.S. dollar gains may pressure foreign bonds in 2018.
- We believe that U.S. debt, with its higher yield and lack of currency risk, may be a better option for suitable domestic investors in 2018.

A Global View on Fixed Income

Even though U.S. yields remain low by historical standards, they are attractive versus their high-quality developed market peers. However, this doesn't mean that U.S. investors should ignore opportunities in foreign bond markets. Similar to our forecast for U.S. bonds, we expect that rising interest rates and fading central bank stimulus are likely to put pressure on foreign developed bonds in 2018.* Emerging market debt (EMD), which generally pays higher rates of interest, and in many cases are issued by countries with higher rates of gross domestic product growth and lower debt levels than many developed nations, may have a brighter return outlook, though valuations remain on the expensive side of recent history.

A GLOBAL LOOK BACK AT 2017

Dollar weakness in 2017 led to strong performance for unhedged foreign bonds, with the asset class gaining 8.8% as measured by the Bloomberg Barclays Global Majors ex-US Unhedged Index, even as rates moved marginally higher over the course of the year in many countries. Hedged returns for the same index, which take out the impact of sometimes volatile currency movements, were much more subdued at 2.1% [Figure 1].



EM bonds, however, were a bright spot in 2017. The asset class hit some headwinds late in 2016 as the U.S. election stoked fears of a trade war. However, this outcome didn't materialize, and higher yields and the benefit of a weaker dollar combined to propel this market higher by 9.3% in 2017 (as measured by the Bloomberg Barclays Emerging Markets Sovereign Index).

DEVELOPED MARKETS UNDER PRESSURE

Similar to our forecast for domestic bonds, we expect high-quality foreign bonds to come under pressure in 2018. A gradual move toward less stimulus from global central banks, combined with continued economic growth, may put upward pressure on rates in foreign developed markets. This would likely translate to lower prices for high-quality sovereign fixed income securities. Other high-quality sectors, such as foreign corporate bonds, could see similar pressures as the European Central Bank (ECB) slows purchases not only in sovereign bonds, but also in corporate bonds, where it has purchased an average of 7.8 billion euros per month since June 2016 under its Corporate Sector Purchase Program (CSPP).

Unhedged foreign bonds benefited from dollar weakness in 2017, but our expectation of potential modest upward pressure on the dollar, as laid out in our Outlook 2018, could mean that currency movements become a drag on unhedged foreign bonds, potentially causing them to underperform their hedged counterparts.

CAN EMERGING MARKETS REPEAT 2017 STRENGTH?

We expect that EMD's attractive yield (4.95% according to the Bloomberg Barclays Emerging Markets Sovereign USD Index as of 1/10/18) may help sustain investor interest in the asset class in 2018, though the interest rate sensitivity of the asset class (duration of 7.3 as of the same date) could be a headwind as we anticipate rates to rise gradually over the course of the year. Additionally, valuations are stretched relative to history, with an option-adjusted spread (OAS) of just 2.7% over comparable Treasuries. This is the lowest OAS since May 2013, though it is possible spreads could compress further, as they remain above levels seen during the 2002-2007 expansion. Dollar-denominated EMD debt could also be hurt if our forecast for moderate dollar strength is accurate (given that it would be more expensive for foreign governments to buy the dollars that they would use to pay back the debt), though strong growth and debt levels that are in some cases lower than their developed nation counterparts should mean any potential pressures from currency fluctuations remain manageable for countries that are impacted.

CONCLUSION

EMD's more attractive yield and slightly lower interest rate risk could help the asset class outperform its foreign developed market counterparts in 2018, though we don't expect a repeat of strong 2017 performance given valuations that are on the expensive side of recent history. As outlined in our Outlook 2018, we expect that a gradual rise in interest rates, driven by continued global growth and reductions in central bank stimulus, could put pressure on foreign bonds overall in 2018. Given these factors, we continue to believe that the higher yields of U.S. bonds may offer more value for appropriate domestic investors.

**As noted in Outlook 2018: Return of the Business Cycle, LPL Research forecasts flat to low-single-digit returns for the Bloomberg Barclays U.S. Aggregate Bond Index, based on its expectations for a gradual pickup in interest rates across the yield curve. LPL Research also expects the 10-year Treasury yield to end 2018 in the 2.75-3.25% range, based on its expectations for a modest pickup in growth and inflation.*

IMPORTANT DISCLOSURES

The opinions voiced in this material are for general information only and are not intended to provide specific advice or recommendations for any individual. To determine which investment(s) may be appropriate for you, consult your financial advisor prior to investing. All performance reference is historical and is no guarantee of future results. All indexes are unmanaged and cannot be invested into directly.

The economic forecasts set forth in the presentation may not develop as predicted and there can be no guarantee that strategies promoted will be successful.

Bonds are subject to market and interest rate risk if sold prior to maturity. Bond values and yields will decline as interest rates rise, and bonds are subject to availability and change in price.

International debt securities involve special additional risks. These risks include, but are not limited to, currency risk, geopolitical and regulatory risk, and risk associated with varying settlement standards. These risks are often heightened for investments in emerging markets.

Emerging market debt portfolios invest primarily in sovereigns, agencies, local issues, and corporate debt of emerging markets in the following regions: Americas, Europe, Middle East, Africa, and Asia.

Government bonds and Treasury bills are guaranteed by the U.S. government as to the timely payment of principal and interest and, if held to maturity, offer a fixed rate of return and fixed principal value. However, the value of fund shares is not guaranteed and will fluctuate.

High-yield/junk bonds (grade BB or below) are not investment grade securities, and are subject to higher interest rate, credit, and liquidity risks than those graded BBB and above. They generally should be part of a diversified portfolio for sophisticated investors.

The market value of corporate bonds will fluctuate, and if the bond is sold prior to maturity, the investor's yield may differ from the advertised yield.

The fast price swings in commodities and currencies will result in significant volatility in an investor's holdings.

Currency risk is a form of risk that arises from the change in price of one currency against another. Whenever investors or companies have assets or business operations across national borders, they face currency risk if their positions are not hedged.

Option-Adjusted Spreads (OAS) represent the difference between the index yield and the yield of a comparable maturity Treasury. The OAS can be used to measure the risk levels markets are placing on high-yield bonds.

DEFINITIONS

Gross domestic product (GDP) is the monetary value of all the finished goods and services produced within a country's borders in a specific time period, though GDP is usually calculated on an annual basis. It includes all of private and public consumption, government outlays, investments, and exports less imports that occur within a defined territory.

Duration is a measure of the sensitivity of the price (the value of principal) of a fixed-income investment to a change in interest rates. It is expressed as a number of years. Rising interest rates mean falling bond prices, while declining interest rates mean rising bond prices. The bigger the duration number, the greater the interest-rate risk or reward for bond prices.

INDEX DESCRIPTIONS

The Bloomberg Barclays Aggregate Bond Index represents securities that are SEC-registered, taxable, and dollar denominated. The index covers the U.S. investment-grade fixed rate bond market, with index components for government and corporate securities, mortgage pass-through securities, and asset-backed securities.

The Bloomberg Barclays Capital Emerging Markets Sovereign Index (USD) measures the investment return of U.S. dollar-denominated bonds issued by governments of emerging market countries.

Bloomberg Barclays Global Majors ex US Index is an index tracking government bonds issued by Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States.

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Weekly Market Commentary | Week of January 16, 2018

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 2017 was an excellent year for international equities, particularly EM.
- We favor the United States and EM equities for tactical global asset allocations based on our outlooks for economic growth, earnings, and political stability.
- We expect strong economic growth and attractive valuations to help EM offset tighter global monetary policy in 2018.

GLOBAL EQUITY MARKET OUTLOOK: FAVOR U.S. AND EM

We favor U.S. and emerging market (EM) equities for tactical global allocations. After reviewing our thoughts on the U.S. equity markets in last week's *Weekly Market Commentary*, we thought we'd expand our 2018 equity outlook with a focus on global markets. As discussed in our *Outlook 2018: Return of the Business Cycle* publication, from a regional perspective, we favor the U.S. and EM over developed foreign markets broadly, although the improving outlook in Japan is noteworthy.

INTERNATIONAL EQUITIES PERFORMANCE REVIEW

The year 2017 was excellent for international equities, especially for EM. The MSCI EAFE and EM indexes returned 25.6% and 37.8%, respectively, both ahead of the S&P 500 Index's 21.8% return. International equity market gains were broad based, as only two MSCI World countries saw their markets decline in 2017 (Russia and Israel). In general, overseas equity markets benefited from U.S. dollar weakness, improving and better-than-expected global growth, a rebound in earnings, and commodity gains.

Within the developed international benchmark, Europe slightly outperformed while Japan slightly underperformed. Within EM, where strength was led by China, some of the risks carried more bark than bite; U.S. trade relations with China and Mexico soured less than feared, while EM generally shrugged off Federal Reserve (Fed) rate hikes and the start of balance sheet normalization.

Investing in foreign securities involves special additional risks. These risks include, but are not limited to, currency risk, political risk, and risk associated with varying accounting standards. Investing in emerging markets may accentuate these risks.

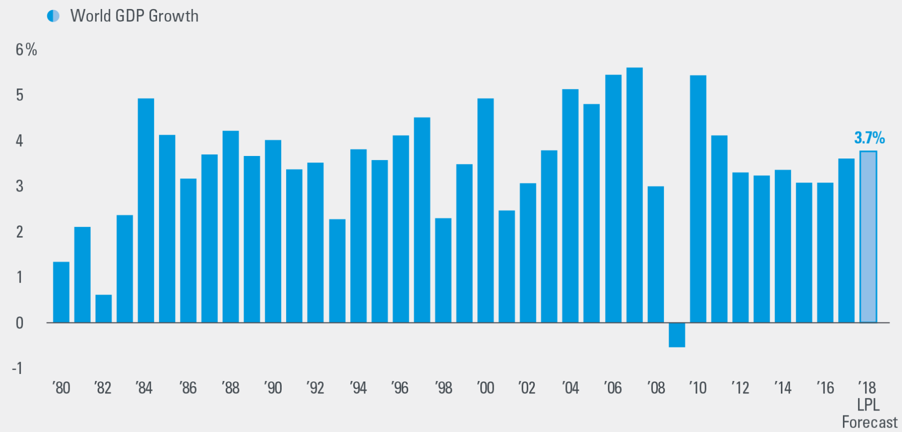
INTERNATIONAL EQUITIES 2018 OUTLOOK

We evaluate regional allocation opportunities by looking primarily at the following factors:

Economic Growth

From a regional perspective, our 2018 economic growth outlook favors the U.S. and EM over developed international economies. For 2018 we forecast gross domestic product (GDP) growth of 2.75-3% in the United States, after factoring in the potential impact of the new tax law, and 4.8% in EM, compared with 1.8% in international developed economies, and 3.7% globally **[Figure 1]**.*

1 GLOBAL GROWTH EXPECTED TO ACCELERATE IN 2018



Source: LPL Research, Bloomberg 01/12/18

All indexes are unmanaged and cannot be invested into directly. Unmanaged index returns do not reflect fees, expenses, or sales charges. Index performance is not indicative of the performance of any investment. All performance referenced is historical and is no guarantee of future results.

GDP – Gross Domestic Product (GDP)

Expected global GDP growth may not develop as predicted.

**Please see our Outlook 2018: Return of the Business Cycle publication for additional descriptions and disclosures.*

Growth in the Eurozone gained traction over the past year, with improving business confidence leading to higher investment as the worst of the political fears failed to materialize. However, uncertainties remain amidst the surge in nationalism, Brexit negotiations, and the upcoming elections in Italy. Considering these challenges, along with a reduction in European Central Bank (ECB) monetary support, it is conceivable that European growth may have peaked.

In Japan, economic growth prospects have brightened. The combination of government spending and monetary accommodation has pulled GDP higher for seven consecutive quarters. While GDP growth is expected to hover around 1.0%, inflation is projected to remain well below the Bank of Japan's (BOJ) 2.0% target, which may keep the zero percent target for the 10-year Japanese government bond in place for the next year or two. Prime Minister Abe has a mandate for more stimulus and structural reforms after his election victory last fall.

We expect economic growth near 4.8% in emerging economies. Advantageous demographics, stable commodity prices, and early-cycle acceleration should help offset slowing but stable growth in China. We expect China's GDP to expand near 6.5%, down slightly from 2017 estimates of 6.9%, supported by the powerful combination of gains in retail sales and industrial production.

Earnings Growth

Consensus estimates are calling for strong earnings growth in developed international markets (+9%), based on the MSCI EAFE Index, according to FactSet. But earnings growth expectations in the U.S. (+14%) and EM (+13%) are both higher. Moreover, revisions to 2018 estimates over the past month have been more positive in the U.S. and EM than in developed international. Although solid earnings growth is anticipated in international developed economies, it is difficult for those earnings to stand out when compared to the acceleration driven by the tax law in the United States and faster growth rates in EM **[Figure 2]**.

2 **U.S. AND EM EXPECTED TO PRODUCE STRONGEST 2018 EARNINGS GAINS**

Source: LPL Research, Bloomberg 01/12/18

Indexes: U.S.–S&P 500, Developed International–MSCI EAFE, and Emerging Markets–MSCI EM.

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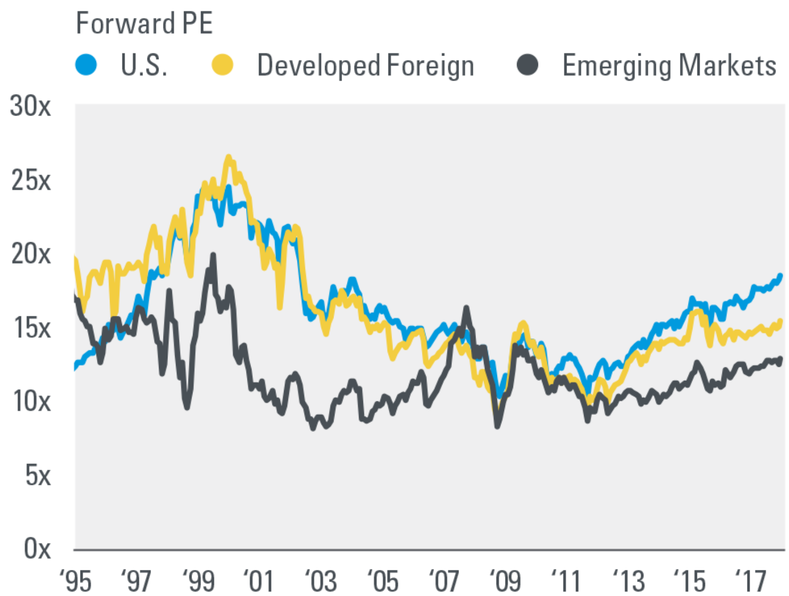
Valuations

Valuations are lower in developed international and EM than in the United States by virtually any measure. While this factor is perhaps the strongest one in favor of developed international allocations, and points to a healthy strategic allocation because valuations matter more longer term, we see potential for better value tactically in EM given the macroeconomic backdrop [Figure 3].

3 INTERNATIONAL EQUITIES VALUATIONS REMAIN RELATIVELY ATTRACTIVE



	Forward PE		Forward PE
U.S.	18.4x	Developed	15.3x
Europe	15.2x	EM	12.9x
Japan	15.3x	Global	16.5x

Source: LPL Research, FactSet 01/12/18

Indexes: U.S.–S&P 500, Developed International–MSCI EAFE, and Emerging Markets–MSCI EM.

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Forward Price-To-Earnings is a measure of the price-to-earnings ratio (PE) using forecasted earnings for the PE calculation. While the earnings used are just an estimate and are not as reliable as current earnings data, there is still benefit in estimated PE analysis. The forecasted earnings used in the formula can either be for the next 12 months or for the next full-year fiscal period.

All performance is historical and no guarantee of future results Estimates may not develop as predicted.

Relative to their long-term histories (25 years) on a forward price-to-earnings basis, the United States is trading at a 25% premium, developed international is trading at a 4% discount, and EM is trading at an 8% premium. However, low valuations in Japan are skewing international developed--Europe is trading at a 23% premium and Japan is trading at a 33% discount.

Political Stability

Relatively speaking, we believe political stability favors the United States, Japan, and China over Europe. Republicans aligned to pass the new tax law and the United States continues to have among the most stable business environments. Japanese President Abe and Chinese President Xi have both consolidated power. President Abe is pursuing market-friendly structural reforms while President Xi is emphasizing balance between market-driven forces and state-owned enterprises. Elsewhere in EM, India is becoming the "new China" under a generally pro-business Prime Minister Modi regime, and Brazil is emerging from political scandal and recession, although an unusually active election season throughout Latin America in 2018 bears watching.

Political stability in EM is atypical, but the picture is relatively encouraging at this point. The political backdrop in Europe will be important to watch and could change dramatically depending on developments in the United Kingdom (Brexit), Italy (March elections), and Germany (in the process of formalizing a governing coalition).

WATCHING FOR U.S. DOLLAR REVERSAL

Currencies are also an important consideration in regional allocation decisions. Last year, a 15% gain in the euro relative to the U.S. dollar helped drive the outperformance of the MSCI Europe Index relative to the S&P 500.

We expect modest upward pressure on the U.S. dollar in 2018 as the Fed gradually hikes interest rates and allows maturing securities to roll off its balance sheet, pushing market interest rates higher, against the backdrop of ECB tapering and continued aggressive monetary policy stimulus from the BOJ. For appropriate investors, we suggest hedging currency exposure in developed international markets when possible, given our expectation that the U.S. dollar may rise.

Currency risk is a form of risk that arises from the change in price of one currency against another. Whenever investors or companies have assets or business operations across national borders, they face currency risk if their positions are not hedged.

CONCLUSION

We favor U.S. and EM equities over their developed international counterparts in 2018. In the United States, a slight pickup in economic growth and fiscal stimulus, including the new tax law, are supportive of a continuation of the bull market. We expect strong economic growth and attractive valuations to help EM offset tighter global monetary policy in 2018. In developed international markets, though our outlook for Japan is positive, growth in Europe may be peaking while structural concerns remain.

IMPORTANT DISCLOSURES

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Investing in stock includes numerous specific risks including: the fluctuation of dividend, loss of principal, and potential liquidity of the investment in a falling market.

Government bonds and Treasury bills are guaranteed by the U.S. government as to the timely payment of principal and interest and, if held to maturity, offer a fixed rate of return and fixed principal value. However, the value of fund shares is not guaranteed and will fluctuate.

Investing in foreign securities involves special additional risks. These risks include, but are not limited to, currency risk, political risk, and risk associated with varying accounting standards. Investing in emerging markets may accentuate these risks.

Because of its narrow focus, specialty sector investing, such as healthcare, financials, or energy, will be subject to greater volatility than investing more broadly across many sectors and companies.

The fast price swings in commodities and currencies will result in significant volatility in an investor's holdings.

All investing involves risk including loss of principal.

DEFINITIONS

The PE ratio (price-to-earnings ratio) is a measure of the price paid for a share relative to the annual net income or profit earned by the firm per share. It is a financial ratio used for valuation: a higher PE ratio means that investors are paying more for each unit of net income, so the stock is more expensive compared to one with lower PE ratio.

Gross domestic product (GDP) is the monetary value of all the finished goods and services produced within a country's borders in a specific time period, though GDP is usually calculated on an annual basis. It includes all of private and public consumption, government outlays, investments, and exports less imports that occur within a defined territory.

INDEX DESCRIPTIONS

The Standard & Poor's 500 Index is a capitalization-weighted index of 500 stocks designed to measure performance of *the broad domestic economy through changes in the aggregate market value of 500 stocks representing all major industries.*

The MSCI Emerging Markets Index is a free float-adjusted market capitalization index that is designed to measure equity market performance of emerging markets. The MSCI Emerging Markets Index consists of the following 21 emerging market country indices: Brazil, Chile, China, Colombia, Czech Republic, Egypt, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Korea, Malaysia, Mexico, Morocco, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Russia, South Africa, Taiwan, Thailand, and Turkey.

The MSCI All Country World Index is an unmanaged, free-float-adjusted, market capitalization-weighted index composed of stocks of companies located in countries throughout the world. It is designed to measure equity market performance in global developed and emerging markets. The index includes reinvestment of dividends, net of foreign withholding taxes.

The MSCI EAFE Index is made up of approximately 1,045 equity securities issued by companies located in 19 countries and listed on the stock exchanges of Europe, Australia, and the Far East. All values are expressed in U.S. dollars. Past performance is no guarantee of future results.

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In Volatile Markets, Investors May Find Comfort in Dividends

Dividend payouts are often seen as a sign of a company's financial health and management's confidence in future cash flow.

When uncertainty at home and abroad roils the financial markets, income-minded investors may find that dividend-paying stocks offer an attractive mix of features and may warrant a place in their equity portfolios.

The appeal is simple: Dividend-paying stocks can provide investors with tangible returns on a regular basis regardless of market conditions.

The Benefits of Dividend-Paying Stocks

If you own stock in a company that has announced it will be issuing a dividend, or if you are proactively considering adding an allocation to dividend-paying stocks, history provides compelling evidence of the long-term benefits of dividends and their reinvestment.

- **A sign of corporate financial health.** Dividend payouts are often seen as a sign of a company's financial health and management's confidence in future cash flow. Dividends also communicate a positive message to investors who perceive a long-term dividend as a sign of corporate maturity and strength.
- **A key driver of total return.** There are several factors that may contribute to the superior total return of dividend-paying stocks over the long term. One of them is dividend reinvestment. The longer the period in which dividends are reinvested, the greater the spread between price return and dividend reinvested total return.
- **Potentially stronger returns, lower volatility.** Dividends may help to mitigate portfolio losses when stock prices decline, and over long time horizons, stocks with a history of increasing their dividend each year have also produced higher returns with less risk than non-dividend-paying stocks. For instance, over the past 10 years, the S&P 500 Dividend Aristocrats -- those stocks within the S&P 500 that have increased their dividends each year for the past 25 years -- produced annualized returns of 9.73% vs. 6.95% for the S&P 500 overall, with less volatility (14.26% vs. 15.28%, respectively).[1]

The Growth of Dividend-Paying Stocks, 1987-2016[2]

If you are considering adding dividend-paying stocks to your investment mix, keep the following thoughts in mind.

- **Dividend-paying stocks may help diversify an income-generating portfolio.** Income-oriented investors may want to diversify potential sources of income within their portfolios. Stocks with above-average dividend yields may compare favorably with bonds and may act as a buffer should conditions turn negative within the bond market.
- **Dividends benefit from continued favorable tax treatment.** The tax bill that passed in early 2013 made the 15% top tax rate on qualifying dividends and other forms of investment income permanent for most investors, though it did raise the top rate to 20% for certain high-income investors. However, this is still lower than the 39.6% top rate on ordinary income.

Note that dividends can be increased, decreased, and/or eliminated at any time without prior notice.

[1]*Return and standard deviation cover the 10-year period ended December 31, 2016. Volatility is measured by standard deviation. Past performance is no guarantee of future results.*

[2]*Source: ChartSource®, DST Systems, Inc. For the period from January 1, 1987, through December 31, 2016. Stocks are represented by the S&P 500 index. Stock prices are represented by the change in price of the S&P 500 index. It is not possible to invest directly in an index. Index performance does not reflect the effects of investing costs and taxes. Actual results would vary from benchmarks and would likely have been lower. Past performance is not a guarantee of future results. Copyright © 2017, DST Systems, Inc. Reproduction in whole or in part prohibited, except by permission. All rights reserved. Not responsible for any errors or omissions. (CS000080)*

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A Year of Spending (and Saving) Wisely

Do you wait until the last minute to pack for your vacation or shop for back-to-school clothes for the kids? Do you find it difficult to start projects -- and then to finish them? Are you chronically late for appointments? If so, then chances are you are a procrastinator.

When it comes to managing your finances, procrastination can keep you from reaching your goals. But by breaking your spending and saving priorities down into monthly increments, you may find it easier to stay on track.

Try some of these tips all year long.

January -- Start an emergency savings fund with the goal of accumulating three to six months of living expenses. By setting aside just $25 a week, you could save $1,300 after just one year. It's important to have a backup plan -- and financial cushion -- when the unexpected happens.

February -- Make sure you are making the most of your tax-deferred retirement savings opportunities. If you have access to an employer-sponsored retirement plan, such as a 401(k), are you contributing the maximum allowed? Generally,you may contribute up to $18,000 to qualified retirement plans in 2017, and those 50 and older may contribute an additional $6,000. (Additional plan limits may apply.) What about an IRA? The good news is you have until April 17, 2018, to contribute up to $5,500 (or $6,500 for those 50 and older) to an IRA for tax year 2017.

March -- Start organizing your tax documents -- Form W-2s from your employer(s), property tax receipts, mortgage interest, charitable donation receipts, etc. -- so you're ready to meet with your tax advisor and get the biggest refund you are entitled to.

April -- If you are one of the roughly 75% of Americans who do get a refund, consider directing it toward your emergency fund or credit card debt, or put the extra money toward your retirement. Every little bit can add up.

May -- Spring is in the air -- and for many Americans -- the weather is warming up. Lowering the temperature on your hot water heater during summer months may help to cut costs. The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) estimates that water heating accounts for about 18% of energy consumed in the average home. The agency recommends turning the heater setting on your water heater to warm (120F degrees) to save on energy costs. Visit the DOE website for more energy saving tips.

June -- Have a green thumb? Vegetables fresh from the garden are less expensive than canned or frozen foods -- and they taste better, too! If you are not an experienced gardener, start small -- try a few tomato plants. And don't forget to water and fertilize regularly.

July -- Are you signing the kids up for sports teams? If so, consider buying the needed equipment at used sporting goods stores. From catcher's mitts to hockey skates, these stores sell their wares at a fraction of the original cost.

August -- Look for everyday learning experiences to teach your children about money. Have young children write down the price of similar items at the grocery store. Assist older kids in learning about managing money by allowing them to buy school supplies with a planned budget. Help children of all ages to set up a savings account at the local bank and decide how much they will plan to save each month for wish-list purchases.

September -- In August and September many auto dealers try to clear their lots to make room for next year's new models. If you don't mind haggling, you may be able to shave money off a car's sticker price.

October -- Plan for year-end tax saving moves. For instance, holding on to investments in taxable accounts for more than one year will generally qualify you for a lower tax rate on any capital gains -- 15% for most taxpayers and 20% for taxpayers in the top income tax bracket (39.6%). Also, keep in mind that realized capital losses can be used to offset realized capital gains for federal tax purposes. Any excess losses up to $3,000 ($1,500 for married individuals filing separate returns) can be deducted against ordinary income. A loss greater than that amount can be carried over to future tax years, subject to the same limits.

November -- Many charities begin active fundraising at this time of year. Generally, charitable contributions to qualified charitable organizations are deductible. Also, before sending a donation to your favorite charity, you may want to obtain more information about the organization by checking various online resources, such as BBB Wise Giving Alliance or Charity Navigator, to find out if the charity meets your giving criteria.

December -- Consider giving yourself an early holiday gift -- the gift of travel. Did you know that the first two weeks of December (after the Thanksgiving rush) is one of the slowest travel periods -- offering some of the best travel deals to destinations in the United States and other locales? If you want to take advantage of the December travel "dead zone," start shopping for flights a month or more in advance.

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Sick of Worrying About Health Care Costs?

In terms of demographic groups, millennials (those age 18 to 36) are the most likely to forgo a medical appointment due to cost, while the Silent Generation (those age 72+) are the least likely to miss a medical visit.

With all the news about rising health care premiums, deductibles, and other out-of-pocket costs, a majority of Americans are concerned about what the future may hold for health care expenses.

A new poll conducted by Bankrate.com found that 56% of respondents are worried that they might not have affordable health care in the future.

Fear of the Future

(Percentage of survey respondents who are concerned about future health care costs)

- Very worried = 35%
- Somewhat worried = 21%
- Not too worried = 17%
- Not at all worried = 24%

The same study found that about one-in-four Americans admit that they -- or a member of their family -- have skipped a visit to the doctor due to the expense. In terms of demographic groups, millennials (those age 18 to 36) are the most likely to forgo a medical appointment due to cost, while the Silent Generation (those age 72+) are the least likely to miss a medical visit.

Age Matters

(Percentage of survey respondents who said cost is a barrier to seeking medical care)

- Millennials (age 18 to 36) = 31%
- Generation X (age 37 to 52) = 25%
- Baby Boomers (age 53 to 71) = 23%
- Silent Generation (age 72+) = 8%

Certainly much of the concern expressed by Americans is justified. With the mantra of "repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act" echoing through the White House and the halls of Congress, the nation waits in limbo as the House's version of a replacement health care bill now rests in the hands of the Senate where it faces significant opposition and a very uncertain future.

Start Your "Sick Day" Fund

Instead of waiting, worrying, and compromising your physical health, consider starting a fund to help pay for the uncovered portions of medical expenses. You may already have a rainy day fund for unexpected home or car repairs, so starting a sick day fund may seem like a familiar exercise.

The following tips will help you start saving more right away.

Stick to your budget. Try to maintain financial discipline by avoiding unnecessary "impulse items" that aren't in your budget or on your shopping list.

Buy in bulk. Instead of purchasing just one of anything you use regularly, you may be able to find the same item at a much lower "unit cost" when it is packaged and sold in bulk at a discount retailer or shoppers' club. While you'll spend more up front, the "economies of scale" may help improve your bottom line within a month or two.

Reduce the cost of debt. Every month, millions of Americans spend their hard-earned money on interest and finance charges that arise from carrying personal debt, such as credit card balances. Wherever possible, transfer any high-interest debt to a single, low-rate account. And needless to say, don't use credit to buy things you can't really afford.

Additionally, whenever you're expecting a tax refund, bonus, or other windfall, be sure to put it to good use. Paying off debt and saving for a "sick day" are almost always better strategies than spending without a plan.

[1] *Bankrate.com, "Worried sick about your health care? You're not alone," June 8, 2017.*

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