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BARRON'S

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The Price Is Wrong

Dollar General pitches low prices and convenience at its 19,000 stores. But customers—and state regulators—say the retailer has a pattern of overcharging.

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Scotch Brite Scrub Sponge (4-count)

PRICE ON SHELF
\$5.00

PRICE AT REGISTER
\$5.50

LOCATION
Florence,
Miss.



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Dollar General: When the Price Isn't Right

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Barron's Roundtable on Fox Business

Watch our weekly show Saturday or Sunday at 10 a.m. or 11:30 a.m. ET. This week, Bank of America's Michael Gapen on whether the economy will suffer a blow from the stress in banking. Plus, a look at Nvidia's big rebound.



Photograph by Meiko Takechi Arquillos; Set styling by Claire V. Walsh

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Company Name	Symbol	Weight
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JP Morgan Chase	JPM	8.67%
Visa A	V	8.25%
Mastercard A	MA	6.86%
Bank of America	BAC	4.51%
Wells Fargo	WFC	3.32%
Morgan Stanley	MS	2.60%
S&P Global	SPGI	2.56%
Goldman Sachs	GS	2.44%
BlackRock	BLK	2.24%

*Components and weightings as of 3/20/23. Please see website for daily updates. Holdings subject to change.



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UP & DOWN WALL STREET

Investors, at their peril, might be applying the lessons of the past 25 years—a time of deflation—to the 15 inflationary years before that.

The Fed's Latest Rate Hike Is Just One More Bad Sign for Investors

Never underestimate the stock market's ability to prioritize hope over experience. Hope would suggest that everything will work out fine: The banking panic that began with Silicon Valley Bank's collapse is just a blip; the Federal Reserve's quarter-point interest-rate hike, despite the turmoil in the financial system, is sound monetary policy; and the S&P 500 index's bounce that began in October really was the start of a new bull market. That the index rose 1.4% this past week, while the Cboe Volatility Index, better known as the VIX, fell 15%, would suggest the problems are manageable.

Experience suggests otherwise. Banking panics aren't something to be trifled with. As Fed Chairman Jerome Powell acknowledged on Wednesday, the latest one is sure to slow the economy. He suggested that it was the equivalent of a rate hike, though some have put it at a half-point or even 1.5 percentage points. Knowing that, Powell still raised rates by a quarter-point, something that is likely to exacerbate problems in the financial system. "The Fed is making a mistake," writes Andrew Brenner of NatAlliance Securities.

The problem, however, isn't the possibility of more bank failures. It's that banks are likely to curtail lending—lending they had already started to limit. Even before the failure of SVB, the Fed's January Senior Loan Officer Opinion Survey showed that the percentage of banks tightening



BY BEN LEVISOHN

lending standards had risen to 44.8%, the highest reading since July 2020, at the peak of the Covid lockdowns. Given the problems at regional banks, that percentage is likely to go even higher.

History suggests that's bad news. The tightening number was already getting close to a level that indicated a recession was near at hand. Bank of America economist Michael Gapen, using lending data from 1991 through 2022, found that a "shock to lending standards" caused declines in employment, consumer lending, and investment in structures and equipment. Gapen acknowledges that the results might be overstated by the financial crisis, as well as the as-

sumption that all banks will tighten lending standards, not just the smaller ones. That's not enough to make him dismiss the results.

"Downside risk to the outlook has risen," he writes. "Adverse shocks to bank credit growth can lead to adverse economic outcomes."

Other indicators are already suggesting as much. In the junk-bond market, the percentage of distressed issues—those with yields 10 percentage points or more above equivalent Treasuries—jumped from 7.8% on March 8, before SVB's collapse to 10.6% just seven trading days later, on March 17, according to Martin Fridson, chief investment officer at Lehmann Livian Fridson Advisors.

That's a massive move in a short period, even faster than the one that occurred over the 31 trading days ended on Dec. 31, 2007, when the distressed ratio rose from 7.5% to 10.4%. Again, there are caveats—the current percentage isn't that much higher than the median of 9.3% from 1997 to 2022—but it's a warning that shouldn't be ignored. "All signs are pointing to the increased probability of a recession," Fridson says.

The stock market would seem to disagree. It has gained 11% since it last

traded at a new low about 5½ months ago, on Oct. 12, leading some to suggest that a new bull market has started. Perhaps. But if it is a new bull, it's the weakest in recent memory, according to Warren Pies of 3Fourteen Research. Since 1974, the S&P 500 has gained an average of 32% in the six months following a previous low. The smallest gains occurred in 1987 and 2002, when the index rose just 13%, so it's possible for the stock market to close that gap. Still, in only one of those periods had the Fed been raising rates, and none occurred when the yield curve was still inverted, as it is now.

"In short, the last six months hold very little resemblance to a typical postbottom environment," Pies writes. "Yet, for equity investors, hope springs."

Of course, the Fed looks like it's coming to the end of its tightening cycle, something that has been mentioned as a catalyst for a market rally. But investors might be applying the lessons of the past 25 years—a period of deflation—rather than those of the 15 years before that, which can be safely be described as inflationary, according to BofA's Michael Hartnett. During the deflationary stretch from 1989 through 2018, the last rate hike was followed by six months of strength, with the Dow Jones Industrial Average returning an average 13.1%. But during the inflationary period, which ran from 1974 through 1984, the Dow dropped an average of 6.4% over the six months following the last increase.

We can only hope that this time that's not true.

Welcome to America the Uninvestible. That seems like a strange thing to say about the go-to destination for investors around the world, offering the world's biggest companies, the most liquid markets, and rule of law to protect shareholder returns. Government interference, too, is supposed to be limited. The fact that U.S. stocks have outperformed the rest of the world's over the past decade has certainly helped as well. In fact, it was



As Fed Chairman Jerome Powell acknowledged on Wednesday, the latest rate hike is sure to slow the economy.

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Up & Down Wall Street (continued)

only last year that we were talking about China being uninvestible.

Its zero-Covid policy had crushed economic growth. The government crack-down on tech companies like **Alibaba Group Holding** (ticker: BABA) and **Tencent Holdings** (0700.Hong Kong) soured investors on what had been the best-performing stocks in that market. And rising tensions between the U.S. and China, including the possibility of the delisting of Chinese stocks from U.S. exchanges, made investing in the world's second-largest economy especially fraught. For most Americans, that's likely still the case, and Chinese stocks now look better as trades than as long-term investments.

But for some international investors, particularly those with no interest in democracy and with money to burn, it might be the U.S. that is starting to appear uninvestible. The U.S. decision to freeze Russia's dollar assets and limit the access of Russian banks to the Swift—Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication—system made holding dollars riskier for any country that might find itself on the opposing side. The current debt-ceiling standoff, too, raises the prospects of a potential U.S. default and could cost the country another AAA rating at one of the credit-rating firms, the kind of own-goal that serious nations shouldn't make.

Nor is government meddling just for China anymore. Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis targeted Disney World's sweet deals because **Walt Disney** (DIS) was too "woke," while California halted a \$54 million contract with **Walgreens Boots Alliance** (WBA) after the company said it wouldn't provide abortion drugs in 21 states that had threatened to sue it. Tech giants like **Apple** (AAPL), **Alphabet** (GOOGL), and **Meta Platforms** (META) are getting it from the left and the right over antitrust issues and free speech. It may be less centralized—and more haphazard—than China's strict controls, but it must surely rub investors the wrong way.

The latest blow, however, may have come from Switzerland, of all places. With **Credit Suisse Group** (CS) under pressure, the Swiss government orchestrated its acquisition by **UBS Group** (UBS) for \$3.3 billion in stock. The bailout wiped out holders of unsecured debt known as AT1, even as equity holders were allowed to walk away with something. It doesn't take an economics degree to know that's not how it's supposed to happen. At the same time, the merger was pushed through without a shareholder vote, once again

circumventing the rules. Now, Switzerland isn't the U.S.—and Europe has protested the bond wipeout—but it does raise the question of just how far Western regulators will go in a crisis.

"[I]f Western economies no longer treat property rights as sacrosanct, why should capital keep flowing from the 'greater South' into the 'unified West'?" writes Louis-Vincent Gave, CEO of research firm Gavekal.

Maybe it won't. In January, foreign investors sold \$36.6 billion of U.S. Treasuries, according to Citigroup data, the fourth month of outflows over the past five. And while the actual dollar amount has risen 6.8% since the end of 2019, the percentage of U.S. government debt held by foreigners has fallen to 29.3%, from 39.2% at the end of 2019.

Gold has been a beneficiary—central banks bought about \$70 billion, or 1,136 metric tons, of gold in 2022, according to the World Gold Council—and it's one that investors, in or outside the U.S., might want to look at. Gold has had a great start to the year, with the **SPDR Gold Shares** exchange-traded fund (GLD) gaining 9.5% so far in 2023. That's a reflection of lower bond yields, the possibility that the Federal Reserve is getting closer to the end of its rate hikes, and risk-off sentiment since Silicon Valley Bank's collapse. As long as investors don't start feeling too comfortable, gold could keep rising.

It may also be time for U.S. investors to look overseas for stocks. Over the past 10 years—the There Is No Alternative era—the **SPDR S&P 500** ETF (SPY) returned 12% including reinvested dividends, easily outpacing the **Vanguard FTSE All-World ex-US** ETF (VEU), which returned just 4.1%. That may be starting to change. Matthew Poterba, a senior analyst at Richard Bernstein Advisors, notes that global and U.S. stocks tend to move in long cycles of out- and underperformance—and the cycle may be shifting away from the U.S. That's in large part due to the rest of the world's lower exposure to technology and tech-related sectors, which tend to do better when interest rates are low, money is easy to come by, and growth stocks outperform.

"Today's macro fundamentals are the opposite," Poterba explains. "If we are correct that inflation and interest rates will remain higher for longer, international markets' sector exposure might boost performance."

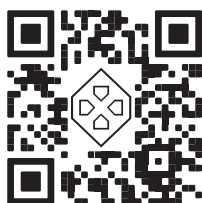
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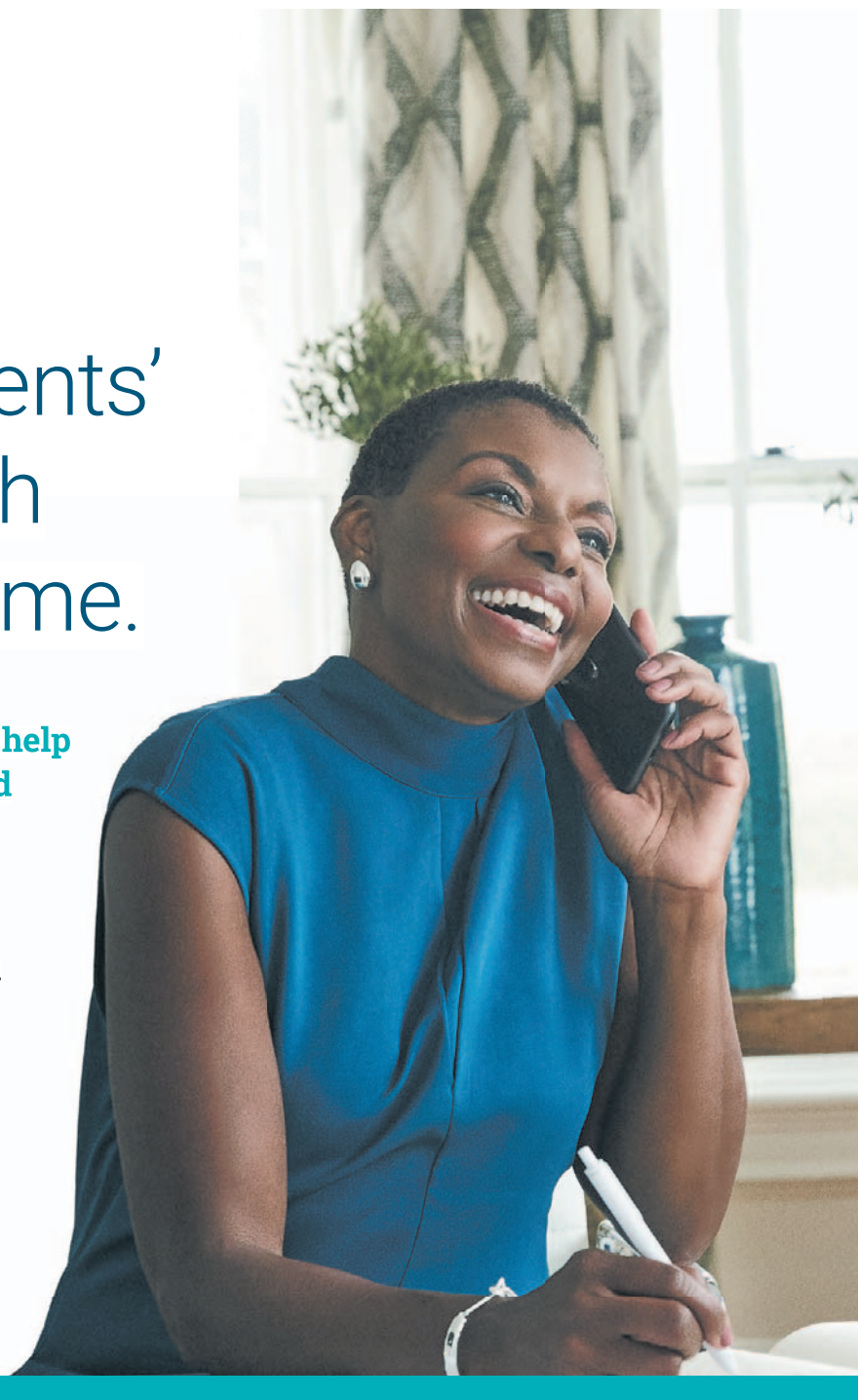
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REVIEW

32,237.53

Dow Industrials: +375.55

474.40

Dow Global Index: +6.27

3.38%

10-year Treasury Note: -0.02



SOFTBANK'S NEWEST RESCUE PLAN

WeWork, Saved Again

For **SoftBank** investors, short-term office-rental company **WeWork** brings up bad memories. WeWork filed to go public in August 2019, but pulled out less than two months later amid uproar over founder and then-CEO Adam Neumann's behavior. In October 2019, SoftBank supplied \$5 billion in financing to WeWork, then wrote down its stake by \$8.2 billion two months later. WeWork finally went public in October 2021 via a SPAC merger, losing more than 90% of its value. It trades around \$.84.

With help from SoftBank, WeWork has dodged a financial crisis. WeWork is cutting debt below \$2.4 billion, from \$3.6 billion, and pushing the bulk of its maturities to 2027, from 2025. WeWork gets more than \$1 billion of new funding and capital commitments and "cancels or equitizes" \$1.5 billion of debt, including \$1 billion held by SoftBank, which will be converted into equity, and \$690.5 million in unsecured notes converted into debt and equity.

Piper Sandler analyst Alexander Goldfarb, who has a \$5.50 target price on WeWork shares, says 42% of the debt will be converted to stock, 10% gets a haircut, and 48% gets new terms. SoftBank's stake, he says, will rise to 72% from 57%, though the exact figure depends on the mix of debt and equity non-Softbank debtholders receive.

A person close to SoftBank says the firm isn't committing new capital to WeWork and won't consolidate it in its financial reporting by keeping its voting control below 50%. As Goldfarb notes, the deal avoids bankruptcy. But stockholders will be diluted; he estimates that WeWork's share count will more than double. The shares, down 44% in 2023, fell 18.2% on the week. —Eric J. Savitz

THE NUMBERS

\$5 T

Total assets parked in money-market funds. Some \$120 billion flowed in during a week in mid-March, most since April 2020.

1.1°C

Earth's 2022 average temperature above that of the preindustrial era, nearing the 1.5°C climate-change tipping point

79

Days on average required to complete a home renovation, up 259% over 2019.

13.3%

The combined S&P 500 weighting of Apple and Microsoft, highest since AT&T and IBM in 1978

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Rates and Risk

U.S. stocks staggered, then rose after **UBS** rescued **Credit Suisse** to begin the week. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said U.S. regulators would protect depositors if more bank runs occur. Stocks surged, then fell back, led by the banks, as the Federal Reserve raised rates and Yellen walked back blanket deposit insurance. Stocks fell again on Friday on renewed bank jitters, then rallied to higher ground. On the week, the Dow industrials was up 1.18%, to 32,237.53, the S&P 500 rose 1.39%, to 3971.18; and the Nasdaq Composite gained 1.66%, to 11,823.96.

Then There Was One

Pressed by regulators, UBS acquired Credit Suisse for \$3.3 billion, creating one giant Swiss bank. The government-backed deal saw \$17 billion in CS' shock-absorbing additional Tier-1 bonds wiped out; Pimco and **Invesco** were major holders. In an unusual move, shareholders, including the Saudi National Bank, received \$3 billion. Bondholders are suing. In crisis mode, the Fed and five other central banks said they would make U.S. dollar swap lines available on a daily, rather than weekly, basis to boost liquidity. By midweek, UBS shares rebounded. But selling pressures resumed among European banks, led by disaster-prone **Deutsche Bank**.

The Fed Call

Faced with a banking crisis and persistent inflation, the Fed's rate-setting committee settled for a 0.25% hike. Fed Chairman Jerome Powell, acknowledging uncertainty, said rate hikes might be ending—"ongoing" was no longer the operative word—but that bank stress could slow the economy further.

The Arrest Watch

Former President Donald Trump said he expected to be indicted and arrested by Manhattan prosecutors over his alleged payment to a porn star before the 2016 election, and called for protests to "take our country back." A week later, no indictment had emerged.

Xi in Moscow

Chinese President Xi Jinping met with

SHE SAID:

"I have not discussed or considered anything having to do with blanket insurance or guarantees of all deposits."

Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, in congressional testimony



Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow, bearing a peace plan and vague efforts to "work together." The results? No mention of China providing lethal weapons to hard-pressed Russia, but promises from Putin to use the Chinese yuan in foreign transactions. Experts now believe that the Russian winter offensive has "culminated." The IMF struck a deal to lend Ukraine \$15.6 billion.

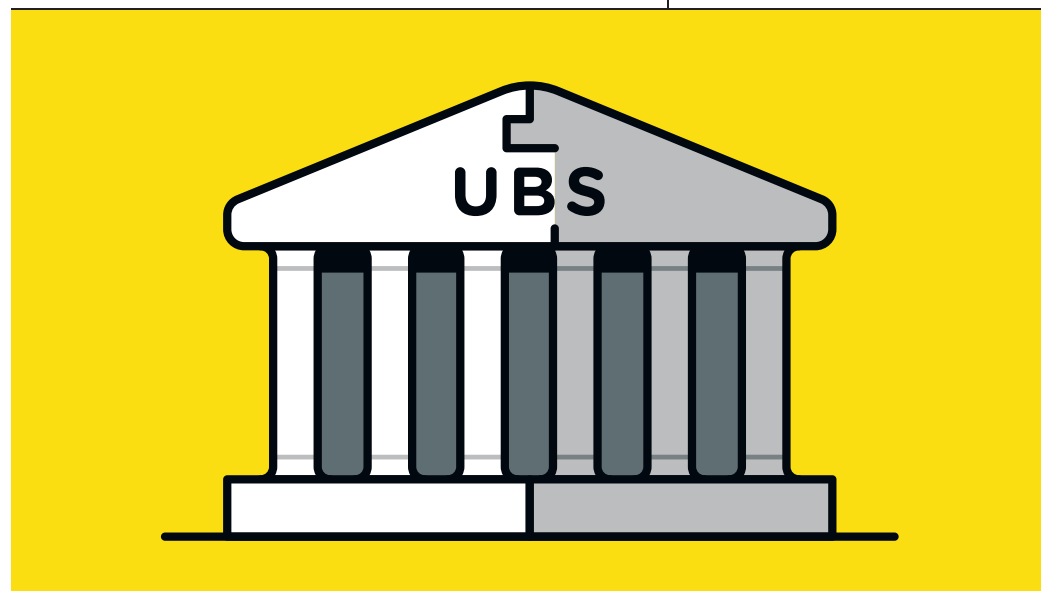
Annals of Deal Making

Failed Signature Bank was acquired by **New York Community Bancorp...First Republic Bank** fell 45% to new lows on Monday. **JPMorgan Chase** CEO Jamie Dimon led new talks on a second rescue plan, after an earlier, \$30 billion infusion failed to stop deposit outflows. The bank hired **Lazard** to explore strategic options...**Apollo Global's** Atlas SP Partners provided \$1.4 billion in financing to **PacWest Bancorp**, which has lost 20% of deposits in 2023...**China Evergrande** finally reached a restructuring agreement with offshore debtholders on \$19.15 billion in notes...Shares of Jack Dorsey's **Block** plunged after short seller Hindenburg Research accused it of "key lapses" in its compliance processes.

PREVIEW

Wednesday Banking regulators appear before the House Financial Services Committee to discuss the collapse of Silicon Valley Bank and Signature Bank. Fed Vice Chair for Supervision Michael Barr and Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. Chairman Martin Gruenberg are scheduled to testify.

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A WEALTH MANAGEMENT BEHEMOTH

The New UBS: Perils of Size

UBS Group's lightning rescue of Credit Suisse Group is, at its core, about wealth management. Both UBS and Credit Suisse have big Swiss retail banks and global investment banks, but wealth management, particularly at UBS, has developed into a core business. Now, the combination of the two franchises will have more than \$3.4 trillion in assets under management, behind only Morgan Stanley.

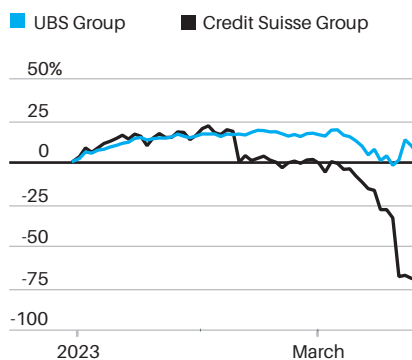
That's the good news and the bad news. UBS says its strategy is unchanged, and the addition of Credit Suisse will enhance its ability to serve clients globally. "The deal is likely to be value-enhancing for UBS and its shareholders, given the steeply discounted price and the downside protection," says CFRA Research analyst Firdaus Ibrahim.

But it won't be easy. S&P Global Ratings revised its outlook on UBS to negative on integration risk. That isn't a problem in the U.S. wealth management. Credit Suisse closed its U.S. advisory unit in 2016, while UBS honed its Americas high-net-worth strategy, with more than 6,000 financial advisors. Credit Suisse's non-U.S. wealth management business is a big get—if UBS can keep its best advisors. "UBS has to tell a story to advisors that the firm wants to retain, and they need to tell it soon," says Alois Pirker, CEO of wealth management consulting firm Pirker Partners.

And Credit Suisse was already shedding assets. The deal offers a chance for rivals, from Morgan Stanley to smaller Swiss banks like Pictet & Cie and Julius Baer, to poach—long a risk in WM deals. "The combo will be a behemoth but not a nimble or appealing player for many of the ultrarich," says independent consultant Bob Casey. "Wealthy families hate bank mergers." — Andrew Welsch and Brian Swint

A Long Decline

Credit Suisse has seen its shares stagger under a variety of self-inflicted blows since 2021. UBS has plowed ahead.

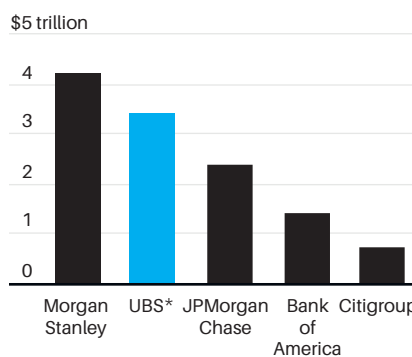


Source: FactSet

The Top Drawer

By buying Credit Suisse, UBS remains a major player in global wealth management.

Assets Under Management



*With Credit Suisse

Source: Company reports

Monday 3/27

BioNTech and **Carnival** report quarterly results.

The Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas releases the Texas Manufacturing Outlook Survey for March. Consensus estimate is for a negative 11 reading, a 2.5 point improvement from February. The index has had 10 consecutive readings of less than zero.

Tuesday 3/28

Lululemon Athletica, **McCormick**, **Micron Technology**, and **Walgreens Boots Alliance** announce earnings.

S&P CoreLogic releases the Case-Shiller National Home Price Index for January. Expectations are for home prices, as measured by the index, to increase 3% year over year, following a 5.8% rise in December. Annualized home-price growth has decelerated every month since peaking last March at a record 20.8%. This past week, the National Association of Realtors reported that the median existing-home sales price was \$363,000 in February, a 0.2% decrease from a year earlier. This was the first decline for existing-home prices since 2012.

The Conference Board releases its Consumer Confidence Index for March. Economists forecast a 101 reading, roughly two points fewer than in February. The index is off its recent lows from last summer, buoyed by continued strength in the labor market. In February, 52% of consumers responded that jobs were "plentiful," while only 10.5% said jobs were "hard to get."

Wednesday 3/29

Cintas and **Paychex** hold conference calls to discuss quarterly results

Intel hosts a conference call to discuss the company's data-center and artificial-intelligence initiatives.

The NAR releases its Pending Home Sales Index for February. The consensus call is for pending-home sales to decrease 2.3% month over month after a 8.1% jump in January. The January increase was the largest since June of 2020 and followed a rough 2022 for pending-home sales, with declines in the first 11 months of the year.

Thursday 3/30

The Bureau of Economic Analysis reports its third and final estimate of fourth-quarter gross-domestic product growth. GDP is expected to have grown at a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 2.7%, unchanged from the BEA's second estimate.

Friday 3/31

The BEA reports personal income and expenditures for February. Both income and spending are forecast to rise 0.3% month over month. This compares with gains of 0.6% and 1.8%, respectively, in January. The core personal-consumption expenditures price index, the Fed's preferred inflation gauge, is seen increasing 4.7% year over year, which would match the January data.

Coming Earnings

	Consensus Estimate	Year ago
M		
Carnival (Q1)	\$-0.60	\$-1.65
PVH (Q4)	1.66	2.84
T		
Cal-Maine Foods (Q3)	4.52	0.81
Micron Tech (Q2)	-0.65	2.59
Walgreens Boots Alliance (Q2)	1.10	1.59
W		
Cintas (Q3)	3.04	2.69
H.B. Fuller (Q1)	0.59	0.80
Paychex (Q3)	1.25	1.15

Consensus Estimate

Day	Consensus Est	Last Period
T March Consumer Confidence	100.0	102.9
TH Q4 GDP	2.7%	2.7%
F February Personal Income	0.30%	0.60%
March Michigan Sentiment	63.4	63.4

Unless otherwise indicated, times are Eastern. a-Advanced; f-Final; p-Preliminary; r-Revised Source: FactSet
For more information about coming economic reports - and what they mean - go to Barron's free Economic Calendar at www.barrons.com

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TikTok Has No Good Options. What It Faces Next.

TikTok's CEO was roughed up at a congressional hearing, which made it clear both political parties support a ban on the video social network



BY ERIC J. SAVITZ

TikTok's future as an independent business is now in doubt.

In a hearing on Thursday, members of Congress spent more than five hours pummeling TikTok CEO Shou Zi Chew with questions about the company's ties to China's leadership and the Chinese Communist Party. Not a single member of the committee stood up for the company, which is fascinating, given that Tik-

Tok's short-form video social network is so popular, with 150 million monthly active users in the U.S. alone.

It is now clear that Congress, and the White House, want TikTok spun off from its Chinese parent ByteDance. And if that doesn't happen, they say they will shut it down.

The fact that TikTok has few friends in official Washington was apparent before the hearing. A bipartisan group of senators earlier this month introduced the Restrict Act, which, among other things, would give the Commerce Department the

power to ban TikTok.

The measure has the support of the White House, which has told ByteDance to sell TikTok or face a ban, according to The Wall Street Journal. But the tone of the hearing underlined the bipartisan nature of TikTok's opposition.

Here are key takeaways from yesterday's marathon hearing before the House Committee on Energy and Commerce:

- **Chew lost the battle before it even started.** Unfortunately for TikTok and the company's CEO, this is an issue that is almost handcrafted to win unanimous congressional support. Congress has been struggling for years to curb the power of social media, to little avail. As one member pointed out, there have been 32 hearings on the topic, with minimal results. TikTok has become a symbol of Chinese technological security risk to the U.S., like the networking infrastructure provider Huawei Technologies. Going after TikTok provides legislators a way to look tough on both social media and China at the same time. They see it as a no-lose issue.

- **The core issue is distrust of Beijing.** In his written testimony, which was posted by the committee one day ahead of the hearing, Chew made the case that separating TikTok from ByteDance wouldn't solve the privacy and security concerns expressed about the app that the company is addressing with Project Texas, its plan to shift all U.S. user data to the **Oracle** (ticker: ORCL) computing cloud, among other things. Alas, that entirely missed the point. No matter what Chew said—or could have said—the only thing that Congress wanted to hear was that ByteDance was going to sell TikTok to an American buyer. And he didn't say that. Indeed, China said this past week that it opposes a forced sale.

- **A TikTok ban would be a win for Meta, Snap, and YouTube.** A ban would shift advertising dollars that run into the billions from TikTok to other platforms, with **Meta Platform** (META), parent of Facebook and Instagram; **Alphabet** (GOOGL), which owns YouTube; and **Snap** (SNAP), the most obvious winners. However, it is likely that the year-to-date rally in social-media stocks already at least partially discounts a potential ban. Alphabet is up 18% this year, and Snap is 28% higher. Meta, largely driven by two rounds of sharp

job cuts, is up 70%.

- **There are risks for the social-media sector, nonetheless.** More than a few members of the committee used the moment to push for other social-media reforms. Some want a comprehensive privacy bill that would govern the way companies like Meta and Snap collect and use consumer information. Others are pressing for modifications to Section 230, a U.S. measure that protects social-media companies—including TikTok—from litigation over user-generated content. Banning TikTok could break the logjam and trigger a flood of new tech regulation. Although this is mostly about China, U.S. social-media sites could be collateral damage.

- **Expect to hear more about Article 7 and Article 10.** Several members at the hearing asked about the need for TikTok and ByteDance to respond to provisions of China's National Intelligence Law that compel companies based in the country to cooperate with state intelligence agencies (Article 7), including those with operations outside the country (Article 10). China has denied it forces companies to share data with the government—but again, Congress doesn't seem persuadable on that point.

- **Chew made strategic errors.** Some members baited Chew with questions about topics like whether China treats the country's Uyghur minority unfairly, and he refused to answer. At one point, he was asked whether he supported the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, and his initial answer was that he was there to talk about TikTok, not other topics. Eventually, he said that the company supported free speech, but the damage had been done.

- **How TikTok could be spun off is unclear.** You couldn't just spin it to shareholders, given what would then be ongoing ties to the Chinese founders of ByteDance. The obvious option would be to find a buyer, but the sheer size of the business would make that challenging. Recall that during the Trump administration—amid a previous round of TikTok ownership drama—there was actually a bidding war for the site, with Oracle apparently winning out over **Microsoft** (MSFT). But that deal was never completed, with TikTok instead reaching a deal with the government to store U.S. user data on the Oracle cloud—the origins of Project Texas. **E**

The Preferred Way to Bet On Banks

With fat yields and more safety than common stock, preferred shares can be lifeboats for investors navigating banking's stormy seas

BY ANDREW BARY

One normally staid corner of the financial markets—preferred stock—has been rattled by the Silicon Valley Bank and Signature Bank seizures, and that has created opportunities for investors.

Preferreds are a senior form of equity whose dividends come before those of common stock. Preferred shares issued by banks, however, account for about two-thirds of the \$400 billion market and the twin bank failures have highlighted the credit risk in these securities.

In fact, the preferreds issued by SVB Financial Group and Signature Bank, the failed banks' parents, might have little or no recovery value. Trading in their New York Stock Exchange-listed preferred and common shares has been halted. And an unlisted SVB preferred issue aimed at institutional investors was fetching about 10 cents on the dollar late this past week over the counter.

While this is certainly worrisome, preferreds still offer a lower-risk way to invest in banks than common shares, and some pros say they now look especially appealing. After its 8.5% drop this month, the sector's largest exchange-traded fund, the \$12.4 billion **iShares Preferred and Income Securities** (ticker: PFF), yields 6.5%. What's more, preferreds



issued by most banks now yield over 6%, a nice premium to the 3.7% on a 30-year Treasury bond.

"This is a great time to step into the market," says Allen Hassan, head of preferred trading at Ziegler.

Preferreds have long been popular with retail investors because of their combination of relative safety, solid yields, and liquidity. Most are issued

For individuals, the preferreds of the largest banks, including Wells Fargo, might hold the most appeal.

with a \$25 face value and trade on the NYSE. There also are institutional preferreds, with a \$1,000 face value, that mainly change hands over the counter.

Dividends on most preferreds are taxed favorably, like those on common stock. Companies are loath to miss preferred payouts because they can't issue common dividends without first paying preferred holders. However, as equity, preferred has more risk than debt.

Newly issued preferred stock can be problematic; it can't be redeemed at face value for five years, limiting the immediate upside, while the downside is unlimited. But now, many \$25 face-value preferreds are trading under \$20, making the risk/reward proposition far more appealing.

"There is uncommon value in the preferred market," says Phil Jacoby, chief investment officer at Spectrum Asset Management, a preferred specialist. Yields are near their highest levels in more than 10 years, he observes, and spreads to yields on risk-free Treasuries are historically wide.

As for the risks, he takes comfort in federal regulatory support for banks on deposits and a new Federal Reserve program that lets banks borrow against their bond holdings.

Spectrum manages the **Nuveen Preferred & Income Securities** closed-end fund (JPS), now trading around \$6. It has an 8% yield, reflecting leverage, and changes hands at a

13% discount to net asset value.

His investment firm also runs the **Principal Spectrum Preferred Securities Active** ETF (PREF), which focuses on institutional issues and yields 5%.

Individual investors might also want to consider the preferred stock of top banks, such as **JPMorgan Chase** (JPM), **Bank of America** (BAC), **Wells Fargo** (WFC), and **Morgan Stanley** (MS). These and some others are considered systemically important financial institutions by Uncle Sam, and so carry more capital and are more strictly regulated than regional banks. And, lately, they generally have benefited from deposit inflows shifted from smaller rivals.

Preferreds from the country's biggest bank, JPMorgan, offer the lowest yields—its 4.2% series M issue yields 5.6%. Bank of America preferreds, like the 4.25% series Q, yields almost 6%, while Wells Fargo and Morgan Stanley preferreds yield close to 6.5%.

(Some investors would rather buy big-bank common shares, currently yielding 3% to 5%, because they have more upside potential.)

Regional banks can offer larger payouts, but also more danger. Investors appear unperturbed about preferreds from **Fifth Third Bancorp** (FITB), **Regions Financial** (RF), and **Cullen/Frost Bankers** (CFR), which yield about 6.5%, only slightly more than some of their too-big-to-fail peers. Higher yields also are available on the preferred of **New York Community Bancorp** (NYCB), which is buying assets of Signature Bank. Its 6.375% preferred has fallen to \$19.45 from \$25 and yields 8.6%.

Then there's **First Republic Bank** (FRC). It has inspired some of the worst jitters, even after a \$30 billion deposit infusion from JPMorgan and 10 other large banks. Its common trades at \$12.50, down 90% this month, while its preferred fetches about \$6, well below its \$25 face value.

Although it suspended its common payout, the bank is still paying preferred dividends. There's risk here—big risk—but investors could benefit if the big banks inject equity into First Republic or if the preferred is converted into common shares on favorable terms.

That bet is suitable only for investors with cast-iron stomachs. Everyone else should stick with the biggest banks. **B**

Income Bargains

The bank panic has created opportunities in some preferred shares.

● Largest Banks	Recent Price	Current Yield
Preferred Issue		
JPMorgan Chase 4.2% series M	\$18.75	5.6%
Bank of America 4.25% series Q	18.08	5.9
Morgan Stanley 6.5% series P	25.47	6.4
Wells Fargo 4.75% series Z	18.55	6.4
● Large Regionals	Recent Price	Current Yield
Preferred Issue		
Fifth Third Bancorp 6% series A	\$21.53	6.8%
Regions Financial 4.45% series E	16.95	6.5
● More Speculative Regionals	Recent Price	Current Yield
Preferred Issue		
New York Community Bancorp 6.375% series A	\$19.45	8.6%
First Republic Bank 4.5% series N	6.21	18.1
● ETF	Recent Price	Current Yield
iShares Preferred and Income Securities / PFF	\$29.92	6.5%

Note: Face value for preferred issues are \$25

Source: Bloomberg

Schwab and the Bank Mess: Sizing Up the Firm's Risks

The brokerage's stock has plunged by more than a third this year as customers yank cash from low-yielding "sweep" accounts. What's ahead.



By **ANDREW WELSCH**

As Silicon Valley Bank imploded and shares of regional banks tumbled earlier this month, investors ramped up their scrutiny of **Charles Schwab**—and sent shares spiraling downward. Executives, including founder Chuck Schwab, acted quickly to reassure investors. Shares rebounded, but at \$53, they are down 36% this year and far below their 52-week high of \$93.

Wall Street analysts suggest that investors, spooked by liquidity concerns everywhere, have overreacted. But there are clear reasons to be cautious toward the stock (ticker: SCHW). Rising interest rates and outflows of clients' cash could take a sizable bite out of Schwab's earnings.

It might seem strange that a company synonymous with investing got swept up in what is ostensibly a bank-

ing crisis. But Schwab owns a bank; one that holds brokerage clients' idle cash in so-called sweep accounts. Last year, more than half of Schwab's \$20.8 billion in revenue came from net interest revenue, or the difference between the interest it earns on bonds and loans and the interest it pays on cash, primarily in its sweep accounts, which now yield just 0.45%.

With short-term interest rates at more than 4%, investors have been moving uninvested cash to higher-yielding options, engaging in "cash sorting." It has been happening "rapidly," says Devin Ryan, an analyst at JMP Securities. Schwab had \$367 billion in deposits at the end of the fourth quarter, down 17% from a year earlier and down 7% from the third quarter. And, says Ryan, "it isn't over yet."

Schwab could bump up the rate it pays customers to stem cash sorting, but analysts don't think it will. That's because some portion of clients' portfolios are apt to remain in cash for

liquidity purposes, despite the low rates, and Schwab doesn't really compete with traditional banks for deposits. What's more, if it did bump up its rate on uninvested cash, earnings would likely take a hit.

Morningstar estimates that earnings would decrease by roughly 9% for each 0.25% increase in the cost of deposits. Schwab earned \$3.90 in 2022 and Wall Street analysts polled by FactSet expected it to earn \$4.88 a share in 2023 as of the end of last year. Now they are forecasting \$4.07 a share.

A company spokeswoman said in a statement that Schwab regularly reviews the interest rates it pays customers and offers a range of cash solutions. "Clients should not leave money they intend for savings and investment needs in any sweep vehicle," the spokeswoman said. "Ultimately, the choice of where to put uninvested cash is up to each client."

The big unknown for Schwab, and for shareholders, is how long cash sorting endures. Schwab believes it will largely abate during 2023. Sweep account outflows in February were about \$5 billion lower than January, and March month-to-date daily average outflows are consistent with February, according to the company. Not all of that money is leaving Schwab; some of it is going to the company's other cash products that pay customers better rates, but which Schwab makes less profit on.

Longer-than-expected cash sorting could put more pressure on earnings. When outflows of client deposits exceed Schwab's cash on hand and the amounts generated by maturing securities, the company taps other funding sources, such as Federal Home Loan Bank, or FHLB, loans, Schwab says. But that is a costly solution.

"When they have to replace that [departing] deposit with FHLB borrowings, which cost well over 4%, it becomes much more expensive," Ryan says. Schwab's "earnings power will be lower than we previously thought, as it accesses higher-cost funding sources and its deposit base shrinks," Morningstar analyst Michael Wong wrote in a March 19 note.

"Assuming that interest rates stay relatively high compared to the previous 10 years, more clients may hold money-market funds or fixed income instead of leaving their cash in Schwab bank accounts," Wong wrote. Steven Chubak, an analyst at Wolfe Research who is bullish on the stock's long-term prospects, notes that April could be a bad month for cash sorting—"clients pull money to pay taxes," he says.

In addition to the worries about cash sorting, investors are concerned about large, unrealized losses in Schwab's securities portfolio. At year end, the company showed some \$14 billion of unrealized losses on a "held to maturity" securities portfolio of \$173 billion. Those losses exceed the firm's tangible common equity, a key measure of its capital base; that stood at \$7.9 billion at year end.

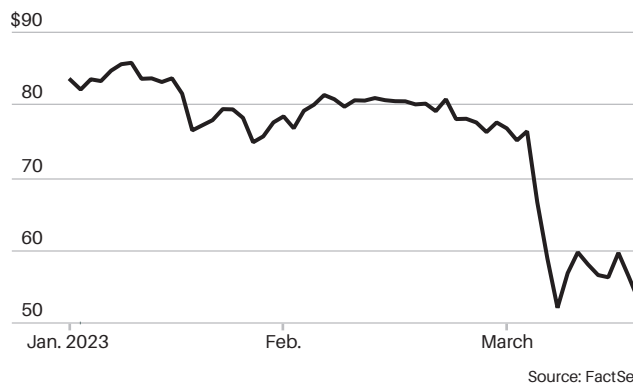
The portfolio, all government-backed mortgage securities, has lost value because of rising rates. The fear is that Schwab might have to start selling those securities, and realizing the losses in its earnings statement, to meet stepped-up cash withdrawals. That's what happened at Silicon Valley Bank.

The Schwab spokeswoman said the company has access to ample sources of cash and a large enough portfolio of "available for sale" securities—\$148 billion as of Dec. 31, already marked to market values—to meet liquidity needs. Given that, "there is almost zero chance" Schwab would be forced to sell securities in its held-to-maturity portfolio before maturity, the spokeswoman said.

CEO Walt Bettinger told The Wall Street Journal that the company would have sufficient liquidity even "if 100% of our deposits ran off."

Yes, Schwab does have a lot going in its favor, not least its scale: 34 million account holders and \$7.4 trillion of client assets. It remains a trusted home for investors in stocks, bonds, and funds. But with the market jittery and interest rates still on the rise, the next few quarters could be a slog for Schwab's own stock. **B**

Charles Schwab
(SCHW / NYSE)



Humana Has a Plan To Pump Up Growth

The insurer is looking beyond Medicare Advantage and beefing up its senior-focused CenterWell business. Its stock could rise 25%.

BY JACOB SONENSHINE

Even health insurers can catch a cold—and that has created a buying opportunity in **Humana** stock.

The health insurer has certainly had a tough stretch. After outperforming through much of 2022 and peaking in early November, its shares have fallen 12% to a recent \$502. That decline can be blamed, in part, on the end of the “defensive trade,” which favored stable stocks like consumer staples, utilities, and healthcare over just about everything else. But Humana (ticker: HUM) also took a hit when the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services proposed a smaller-than-expected price increase for Medicare Advantage plans, Humana’s largest source of revenue, earlier this year.

Investors needn’t worry. Despite the smaller increase, Humana expects to be able to exceed its previous profit targets. The company also recently announced that it would exit the employer-based insurance business, freeing cash to focus on its more-profitable operations. And while concerns linger about the future of Medicare Advantage at a time when the government is more focused on its spending, Humana should continue to grow briskly. At a fraught moment for investors, Humana stock looks like a winner.

“The big-picture trajectory remains favorable,” writes Oppenheimer analyst Michael Wiederhorn,



who has a \$630 price target on Humana shares, reflecting 25% upside from Friday’s close. “We expect that to continue in 2023 and beyond, due to industry drivers along with company-specific actions.”

Humana, unlike some other insurers, focuses on older Americans. More than 84% of its revenue comes from insurance premiums, while the remaining 16% comes from its newer CenterWell business, which provides home care, pharmacy services, and primary care to seniors.

Medicare Advantage, though, is where Humana really excels. The plans offer seniors a bundled set of benefits that provide Medicare Parts A, B, and D benefits and charge few out-of-pocket fees. That business generated nearly \$73 billion in sales in 2022, or 80% of Humana’s insurance revenue. The company is the second-largest player in the space, trailing only **UnitedHealth Group** (UNH). As Medicare Advantage goes, so goes Humana.

That is why the government’s preliminary guideline for a 1.03% increase in 2024 for Medicare Advantage premiums took investors aback, particularly following an 8.5% increase in 2023. A smaller increase should mean slower revenue growth, but Humana has ways to offset it. For one, the company will offer fewer benefits, which could mean slower customer growth but would protect profits. Analysts forecast sales

growth of just over 9%, to \$112.9 billion, in 2024, while operating margins should rise to about 4.9% from an expected 4.7% this year.

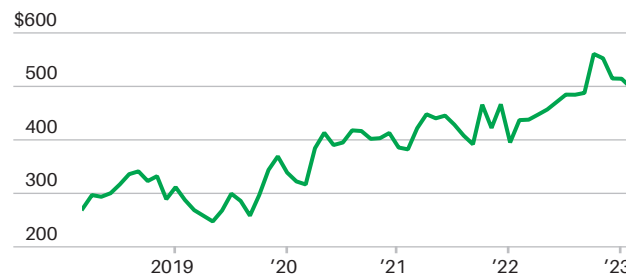
And even if the increases continue to disappoint, the number of Americans signing up for Medicare Advantage almost certainly won’t. About half of the 60 million seniors in the U.S. use the plans, according to trade association AHIP, and it’s likely that many of the remaining 30 million eventually will, according to a Kaiser Family Foundation report. In addition, the number of seniors should keep growing as well, hitting 95 million by 2060.

“It’s all about more and more senior citizens signing up for Medicare Advantage,” says Igor Krutov, director of research at Vontobel Asset Management. “The volume growth for MA should be high for years and years.”

“The stock is driven by earnings growth, which is still attractive.”

Cowen analyst
Gary Taylor

Humana (HUM / NYSE)



Source: FactSet

The biggest risk may be political. The national deficit, now more than \$720 billion, is getting more attention than ever, as is Medicare’s potential insolvency. Medicare Advantage plans, which tend to cost less than traditional coverage, are also receiving more scrutiny, which is likely one reason for 2024’s small price increase. Still, given the plans’ popularity and lobbying pressure from the industry, politicians for both parties are incentivized to keep the insurers happy.

“There’s strong bipartisan support now” to keep premiums elevated, says Krutov. “Just because they gave a smaller increase this year doesn’t mean it’s going to be the case for 2025, 2026, and 2027. So, I think there’s a one-off element to this.”

Of course, there’s more to Humana than just Medicare Advantage. The company is ramping up its higher-margin CenterWell business by buying more physician practices. The number of its primary-care centers rose to 235 at the end of 2022 from 206 in 2021, freeing doctors from administrative processes while the company works with them to find low-cost, reliable solutions for patients.

CenterWell is small, but growing fast. Sales for the unit were \$4.1 billion in the fourth quarter, with a 6.4% operating margin. That’s higher than the company’s total expected margin for calendar year 2023 of about 4.8%. As the business grows as a percentage of the total, Humana’s operating margin should grow to 5.2% by 2026. The result would be about 14% annual earnings-per-share growth through 2026.

“The stock is driven by earnings growth, which is still attractive,” says Cowen analyst Gary Taylor, who has a \$581 price target, up 16% from recent prices.

Humana stock looks cheap. It trades for 17.8 times 2023 earnings expectations, a market multiple for a stock that is growing roughly twice as fast as the S&P 500. It’s also cheaper than UnitedHealth, which trades at 19.1 times 2023 expected earnings. Closing that gap could see the stock trade at around \$540, up 8% from recent prices—even without the benefit of growing profits, which could push Humana shares even higher over time.

And that should give any portfolio a healthy glow. **B**

PRICE CHECK

A *Barron's* analysis finds that four states fined Dollar General a total of more than \$1 million for overcharging customers in 2021 and 2022.

BY
CATHERINE
DUNN

Angaleigh Blanchett has been a **Dollar General** customer for two decades. The store near her Cleveland, Ohio, home is her go-to for certain household staples, at prices reliably lower than the local supermarket or drugstore. She says she saves up to \$4 a pack on one of her regular purchases—Huggies diapers for her 2-year-old son—“a huge difference when you’re on a budget,” says Blanchett, who owns a small construction company.

But this past fall, she noticed something was off. When checking out, her total kept coming in higher than she expected based on the prices on the shelves. At first, she let it go. But eventually, after being charged \$10.95 for diapers marked as \$10.50 and \$7.95 for body wash that should have been \$6.50, she spoke up and got her bill corrected.

Blanchett wasn’t the only one noticing the fuzzy math. About 250 miles away, in Butler County, north of Cincinnati, another Dollar General (ticker: DG) customer contacted the county auditor’s office, saying he’d been overcharged. That complaint triggered a raft of store inspections and a late-October announcement from the auditor that all 20 Dollar General stores in the county had failed pricing checks with too many errors. Items like a six-pack of soda and frozen pizza scanned \$1.25 higher than the shelf price, disposable cups \$1.70 higher, and chicken strips

\$2.80 higher.

On Nov. 1, Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost sued Dollar General in Butler County, accusing the company of deceptive practices and “bait” advertising, later requesting a temporary restraining order in the Butler County, Ohio, Court of Common Pleas. In addition to Butler, four other counties had notified the company of failed inspections, Yost said. “Everything we buy these days costs more,” said the AG, announcing the suit. “Ohioans can ill afford businesses that draw people in with the promise of low prices only to deceive them at the checkout counter.” In the suit, Yost asks the court to impose a penalty of \$25,000 for each alleged violation.

More than 100 people shared complaints about pricing errors at Dollar General with the AG’s office, according to court filings. Some described feeling scammed, told of heated in-store arguments, and explained how they relied on the store while living on a fixed income or using food-assistance benefits. “The amounts are small but add up,” said one, in a complaint to the attorney general. “I only want to pay the fair price without feeling cheated.”

Dollar General declined to comment on “pending legal matters,” but the company has asked a judge to dismiss the Ohio suit. In a January filing, it said it has taken “extraordinary steps” to correct any alleged price discrepancies in Ohio stores, and that it would contact customers who filed

complaints with the AG’s office to provide reimbursement.

While the company is fighting the case, a review by *Barron's* found a broader pattern of overcharges at the fast-growing retailer.

In addition to the court records in Ohio, *Barron's* analyzed data from four other states that issued multiple penalties to the company in the past two years. In North Carolina and Louisiana, Dollar General accumulated the largest fine total for pricing violations of any retailer in both 2021 and 2022. In Mississippi, Dollar General topped the list of fines in 2022. And in Arizona, the retailer had the second-highest fine total in 2021 and third-highest in 2022.

Cumulatively, the company was assessed just over \$1 million in pricing violation fines in those four states during 2021 and 2022, records show.

The company is also facing proposed class-action lawsuits over mispricing allegations. Dollar General has asked courts to dismiss suits that were filed in Ohio and New Jersey in October. On March 24, the company said in court papers it anticipates filing a motion to strike class allegations in a New York case filed in January.

While retailers such as **Walmart** (WMT) and **Target** (TGT) loom large in the American consciousness, Dollar General is a prolific merchant, saying that it has more U.S. stores than any other retailer. The company celebrated its 19,000th store opening in January; Walmart has 5,317 U.S. locations. Dollar General pitches low prices and convenience to a core base of customers who it says make \$40,000 or less a year. Three-quarters of its locations are in rural areas and small towns of fewer than 20,000 people. This formula generated \$37.8 billion in net sales and \$2.4 billion in profit in 2022 (up 61% and 97%, respectively, over the past five years). Investors seem to approve: Dollar General’s stock has more than doubled over the past five years, to a recent \$210 a share.

But alongside its rapid expansion and strong fiscal performance, the company has battled a variety of operational and regulatory issues. Last year, federal regulators fined Dollar General more than \$8 million in proposed penalties over safety hazards in its stores. Its treatment of workers came to the fore in the aftermath of the pandemic, with employee complaints of low wages and insufficiently staffed stores taking off on social media. The allegations of repeated mis-

charges are the latest complaint against the company, and one that comes at a moment when its customers are already facing high inflation.

Dollar General declined to make a representative available for an interview. In a statement, the company said, “Dollar General is committed to providing customers with accurate prices on items purchased in our stores, and we are disappointed any time we fail to deliver on this commitment. When a pricing discrepancy is identified, our store teams are empowered to correct the matter on the spot for our customers.”

The company said it is proud to employ local residents in 47 states, and encourages employees to provide feedback through company channels “so we can listen to and collaboratively address concerns.” In response to questions about federal workplace-safety fines, Dollar General said it “is committed to providing a safe work environment for its associates and shopping experience for its customers,” and that it regularly reviews and reinforces safety programs.

In court filings, Dollar General says that pricing discrepancies can occur because of “lag time” between when a new price is uploaded to its electronic checkout system and when a physical label reflecting that new price is placed on the shelf.

State officials, customer complaints, and current and former Dollar General employees link troubles with pricing discrepancies to insufficient staffing. In the Ohio lawsuit, a customer who said she was charged \$3.25 for batteries labeled \$1.50 said in her complaint that she was told by a Dollar General cashier the store was “too understaffed to fix every label.”

“When you have repeat offenders, it’s often a labor issue,” says Mike Strain, commissioner of the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry, which conducts price inspections for the state. Whatever the cause of that labor problem, it’s up to businesses to make price accuracy “a priority,” he says. “If you’re going to keep your shelves stocked and the floors clean, then you can keep the right price on commodities.”

The combination of a tight labor market and spiraling inflation has put many retailers in a difficult spot when it comes to keeping price labels updated. (Scott Mushkin, founder of retail research firm R5 Capital, puts it this way: “It’s been giving the industry

A sampling of Dollar General price discrepancies found by state regulators in Mississippi and Louisiana in 2022.



Ocean Spray Cranberry Juice 64 fl. oz.

PRICE ON SHELF \$3.25 PRICE AT REGISTER \$3.85



Suave Shampoo Almond And Shea 28 fl. oz.

PRICE ON SHELF \$4.00 PRICE AT REGISTER \$4.25



Takis Fuego 9.9 oz.

PRICE ON SHELF \$ 3.00 PRICE AT REGISTER \$3.50



Velveeta Shells

PRICE ON SHELF \$1.65 PRICE AT REGISTER \$1.75



Kleenex Soothing Lotion 60 3-Ply Tissues

PRICE ON SHELF \$1.60 PRICE AT REGISTER \$1.75



Lysol Disinfectant Spray, Mango Hibiscus 19 oz.

PRICE ON SHELF \$5.80 PRICE AT REGISTER \$7.00



Huggies Pull Ups 4T-5T

PRICE ON SHELF \$10.95 PRICE AT REGISTER \$11.50



Fresh Step Gain Cat Litter 14 lb.

PRICE ON SHELF \$10.00 PRICE AT REGISTER \$11.95



Dawn Polymesh Scrubber

PRICE ON SHELF \$1.75 PRICE AT REGISTER \$2.00

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Photographs by Halle Chavez



fits.”) In Dollar General’s March 16 earnings announcement, CEO Jeff Owen said the company plans to spend an additional \$100 million in store operations this year, with the bulk of that money going to adding staffing to stores. The investment will “elevate our store standards and our consistency,” Owen said on an analyst call.

The question of whether Dollar General can or will fix its price-accuracy problem comes as the company continues to grow: Dollar General plans to open more than 1,000 new stores this year alone, more than any other retailer, according to Coresight Research. It’s also broadening its market, expanding its higher-end concept Popsheff, and continuing to scale up grocery—a consumer staple that has been hit hard by inflation—with the aim of selling fresh produce in more than 5,000 stores by the end of 2023. Blanchett, who had assumed the pricing problem was confined to her local stores, was struck to learn there were complaints in other parts of her state—and beyond.

“These Dollar General stores are put in low-income areas for a reason, and they’re made so people who are low-income can afford basic things they need,” she tells *Barron’s*. “But then the price gouge on people who already don’t have a lot of income is upsetting to me, because at that point it feels like

you’re preying on the weak.”

Many of the price discrepancies found by regulators might, at first glance, seem minor. In Louisiana, for instance, price-verification inspectors last year found a package of frozen french fries priced at \$4.50 that rang up at \$5.75, a multipack of toilet paper with a shelf price of \$9.50 came in at \$10.50, and a \$1 can of tomatoes scanned at \$1.50.

But Dollar General has historically made clear that small differences are significant for its customers. The company has said it prices products in five-cent increments so shoppers can easily track their total spend. “They don’t want to be embarrassed when they get up to the register,” then-CEO Todd Vasos told *The Wall Street Journal* in 2017. In 2019, *Fortune* reported that Dollar General was adding more price-checking scanners in aisles so customers could keep tabs on their bill. “They don’t always have that extra dollar in their budget,” an unnamed Dollar General executive told the magazine at the time.

Before its current scuffles with state price checkers, Dollar General tangled with Vermont on the issue. Officials there said inspectors told the company “at least 50 times” to fix price errors, and found violations at 22 stores between 2013-19. In 2019, the company agreed to pay a \$1.75 million

Kenya Slaughter, above, works at a Dollar General in Louisiana. As an organizer-in-training with labor advocacy group Step Up Louisiana, she is pushing for higher wages and increased staffing hours.

settlement. As part of the agreement, it was required to institute a series of measures to fix the problem, including adopting a pricing-accuracy policy, training employees on pricing, and employing “field pricing specialists” to perform weekly audits of Vermont stores.

Prior to the settlement, Dollar General stores were cited for violations in 57 cases over six years; since then, there have been just five cases, suggesting the new measures made an impact. “From a programmatic point of view, we feel that it had a positive influence on [Dollar General’s] pricing,” says Marc Paquette, chief of the weights and measures section for the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets.

The task of inspecting price accuracy in stores, known as “price verification,” varies by state but generally limits companies to a 2% failure rate: One item out of 50 can scan at a higher price.

In the past two years, inspectors in some parts of the country reported growing problems with price accuracy as inflation and labor shortages coursed through the economy. North Carolina is indicative of trends in the pricing-error data analyzed by *Barron’s*. Chad Parker, measurement section manager for the North Carolina Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services Standards Division, says violations in the state have spiked. Before 2021, he says, North Carolina fined companies an average of \$50,000 a year for violations. In 2021, total fines for pricing errors reached \$232,270, then more than tripled to \$818,045 in 2022, according to state data.

Dollar General led the pack: \$116,390 in fines in 2021—about half the total—and \$357,935 in 2022. Behind Dollar General in 2022 were Family Dollar, whose parent company is **Dollar Tree** (DLTR), with just over \$238,000 in fines; and Walmart, with \$137,000.

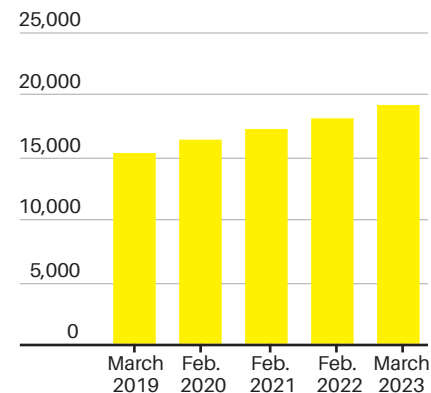
In a statement, Family Dollar said it is “committed to operational compliance and providing our customers with accurate pricing and complying with all applicable laws.” Walmart didn’t respond to requests for comment. (Family Dollar is also facing a suit from the Ohio attorney general over the issue, and has not yet filed a response to that complaint.)

Dollar General has engaged with North Carolina, says Parker, but the issue remains unresolved. “They’ve met with us. They’ve tried to correct it, and they’re still having problems.”

Here, There, Everywhere

Dollar General is growing fast. The company opened its 19,000th store in January.

Dollar General Store Count



Source: Company reports

Dollar General’s operating model revolves around keeping costs as low as possible. Labor is a major cost center for any retailer, and Dollar General is no exception. Dollar General said in its annual report to the Securities and Exchange Commission last year that “many of our entry-level store employees are paid at rates in line with the applicable state minimum wage.” The company’s median employee, which it defines as a store associate working part time, made \$17,773 in 2021, according to a securities filing. That year, 92% of Dollar General workers made less than \$15 an hour, according to survey data collected by the Shift Project at Harvard and published by the Economic Policy Institute, a think tank based in Washington, D.C. On the company’s March analyst call, CEO Owen was asked about the company’s current average hourly wage; he declined to answer.

The company told *Barron’s*: “We offer competitive wages for the local labor market and a wide range of benefits including day-one telemedicine eligibility, debt-free degree programs and education options, and the Dollar General Employee Assistance Foundation.” It also pointed to opportunities for workers to grow their careers, saying, “Approximately 75% of store employees at or above the lead sales-associate position (including assistant managers and store managers) were internally promoted.”

Some workers have countered this characterization, saying that in addition to its low pay, the company maximizes profits by understaffing

stores. Mary Gundel was a Dollar Store manager in Tampa last spring when she posted a series of TikTok videos describing exhausting workloads and cuts to the number of hours she was allowed to use for staffing her store. She was fired soon after her first posts, but her videos went viral and other Dollar General employees followed her lead, sharing their frustrations with conditions in stores on the app.

Asked about Gundel's description of her former employer, Dollar General told *Barron's* that the company does "not comment on specific employee matters."

R5 Capital's Mushkin says his company's field research on Dollar General stores suggests that the company is "at least short one person in half the stores." His team has seen boxes of product piled up in the aisles and visited stores where "there's just no one at the cash registers" because employees are attending to other work, he says.

The company's recent statement that it would invest an additional \$100 million in store operations doesn't go far enough, says Mushkin. "We see this as a down payment, rather than a fix to the very poor store conditions that we have been documenting in our field research," his firm said in a recent note.

Dollar General said it did not plan to comment on analyst reports.

Kenya Slaughter works at a Dollar General in Alexandria, La., and is an organizer-in-training with the economic justice group Step Up Louisiana. In addition to pushing the company to raise wages, Slaughter believes Dollar General needs to increase staffing hours at stores to provide safety for workers, so no one has to work alone, and to make workloads manageable.

Slaughter says her store is usually permitted to schedule its roster of hourly workers for a total of between 140 and 155 hours a week. That isn't enough to consistently staff even two employees at a time, she says. Managers aren't included in hourly totals, and can end up working long hours without overtime to keep stores running, says Slaughter.

Dollar General didn't provide *Barron's* with a comment on Slaughter's description of her store. In September 2021, the company told the *New York Times* that "our operating standards are designed to provide stores with sufficient labor hours, and it is not our expectation that store managers should

work 70 to 80 hours per week."

Dollar General typically does large-scale price changes on Tuesdays. New prices are pushed to the stores' check-out systems electronically, but the prices listed on the shelves must be changed manually. The company also releases new sales and promotions regularly, triggering yet another round of updates.

At Slaughter's store, refrigerated food products arrive on Tuesdays, the same day as price changes. With so few employees scheduled, updating prices is very difficult, given employees' other responsibilities: "It's nearly impossible to do that while trying to run a register or trying to stock food," she says.

A former Dollar General employee based in Ohio says they had a short window on Saturday nights to change prices for new deals in their store, while also attending to customers. The level of staffing made it "really hard to get any task accomplished," the former employee says.

So far, the company's pricing issues don't seem to be deterring Wall Street. With the stock up 125% in the past five years—versus 47% for Dollar Tree, 60% for Walmart, and 44% for the S&P 500—it's an analyst favorite. Oppenheimer analysts named Dollar General a "top pick" for 2023, and rate the stock as a Buy equivalent, with a \$260 price target. Telsey Advisory Group also has Buy rating, and a \$242 price target.

"The macro uncertainty and the consumer looking for ways to save money on food and groceries and household essentials is driving them to Dollar General," says Telsey analyst Joe Feldman. As for labor, Feldman says retailers are in a "competitive environment," and that Dollar General's plans for additional spending in that area is "a recognition on their part that they need to put more investment into their store labor so their consumer can have a better experience."

Mushkin's firm, meanwhile, rates Dollar General as a Sell. Short staffing has "created a lot of chaos at those stores," he says, estimating that correcting the gap would cost at least \$350 million a year, and could "approach \$1 billion."

"You have to get more associates into these stores, and then you're probably going to have to pay them more," Mushkin says. "And on the store manager front, it's probably the same thing. You've got to stabilize the

entire store labor model. That's the biggest challenge with DG right now."

In Ohio, Dollar General staved off the attorney general's motion for a temporary restraining order. Instead, it struck a deal with the AG in February, promising to monitor price changes more closely, educate employees about requirements to charge customers the shelf price if asked, and provide "sufficient coverage" for employees to be able to update shelf prices. The agreement wasn't an admission of liability. Yost called it a "step in the right direction," and said his lawsuit would continue.

Marc Dann, the lawyer whose firm is suing Dollar General on behalf of consumers in Ohio, New Jersey, and New York, says he thinks the only way to halt overcharges is to make it "more expensive to cheat than to comply."

"In so many aspects of people's lives, companies exercise this kind of power, and customers have very little remedy," Dann, a former Ohio attorney general, tells *Barron's*. "You're kind of a prisoner of these guys."

Blanchett, the Dollar General shopper in Cleveland, says she wants the company's stores to have better management and organization. She had noticed what seemed like labor problems at her local Dollar General even before she spotted the overcharges: Earlier last year, the store kept closing in the afternoon, well short of its posted hours. She called the company about it and was assured the issue had been resolved.

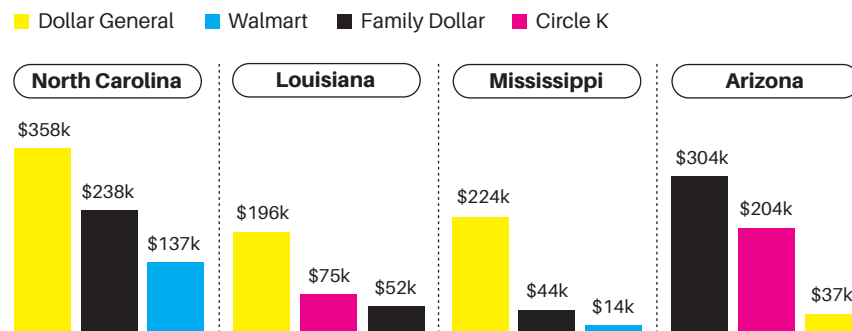
After filing a pricing complaint with the AG's office, Blanchett received a letter and a \$10 gift card from Dollar General in February. "While we do not know the specifics of your transaction, we always strive to satisfy our customers," the letter said.

The amount fell short in Blanchett's eyes. "I'm pretty sure you all got way more out of me than \$10," she says. But she needed some Ziploc bags and decided she might as well use the funds. When she got to her local Dollar General at 5 p.m., she said she found the store had closed early. **B**

The Price Is Wrong

As inflation has surged, Dollar General and other retailers have not always kept prices updated on store shelves. Many states have laws requiring companies to list accurate pricing information, though statutes and enforcement vary. *Barron's* analyzed penalties levied against companies for price accuracy violations in four states in 2022. Here's what we found:

Top 3 Penalties Per State in 2022



Sources: North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services; Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry; Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce; Arizona Department of Agriculture

Company Responses

Dollar General...told *Barron's* that the company "is committed to providing customers with accurate prices on items purchased in our stores, and we are disappointed any time we fail to deliver on this commitment. When a pricing discrepancy is identified, our store teams are empowered to correct the matter on the spot for our customers."

Family Dollar...said it is "committed to operational compliance and providing our customers with accurate pricing and complying with all applicable laws."

Circle K...said it believes "pricing discrepancies are isolated... they are unintentional, and we apologize to any customers who may have been affected." The company said it takes the issue seriously and works to take corrective action when discrepancies are discovered.

Walmart...didn't respond to requests for comment.



The Countdown: You're 10 Years From Retirement. What Now?

Smart planning in the final stretch can help you retire confidently and on schedule.

BY ELIZABETH O'BRIEN

While retirement planning is a decadeslong endeavor, the way you handle your final decade before leaving the workforce will have a critical impact on how ready you'll be when that day finally arrives.

"It hits about 10 years out—this

train is coming to me," says Danielle Byrd Thompson, a financial professional at Equitable Advisors in Washington, D.C. "It's like a time clock is starting."

Of course, that final stretch is far easier to navigate when the stock market cooperates. From 2009 through 2021, the bull market was a wind at preretirees' backs, with the S&P 500 index delivering 16% annualized total returns. Last year, though, the

weather changed: U.S. stocks fell nearly 20%, and U.S. bonds, as tracked by the **iShares Core U.S. Aggregate Bond** exchange-traded fund (ticker: AGG), dropped 13%.

This year hasn't been any easier to navigate, especially recently, as banking-sector chaos has whipsawed stocks and intensified fears of a recession.

While the near-term outlook may be unsettled, the forecast brightens when you look further out. BlackRock predicts that over the next 10 years, a classic global portfolio of 60% stocks and 40% bonds will return an annualized 7.6%; J.P. Morgan Asset Management foresees 7.2% for the same.

Of course, you can't actually predict the future of the market, so your pre-retirement checklist should focus elsewhere: your asset allocation, savings rate, and contingency planning. "Relying on the market to do one's retirement planning for you is overreliance on something you can't control," says

K. Esther Szabo, a certified financial planner and the CEO of Gates Pass Advisors in Los Altos, Calif.

Fine-Tuning Asset Allocation

When the market is underperforming, it may be tempting to try to juice your returns. But the run-up to retirement isn't the time to take on more risk in your portfolio, experts caution. Instead, focus on transitioning from building wealth to preserving wealth, says Maddi Dessner, head of global asset-class services at Capital Group. That means an increased focus on higher-quality investments with a narrower range of outcomes and less volatility, she says. For example, consider rotating out of high-growth stocks into income-oriented equities, and, on the bond side, be wary of high-yield, aka junk, bonds.

Advisors recommend that investors within 10 years of retirement aim for an asset mix of about 60% stocks and

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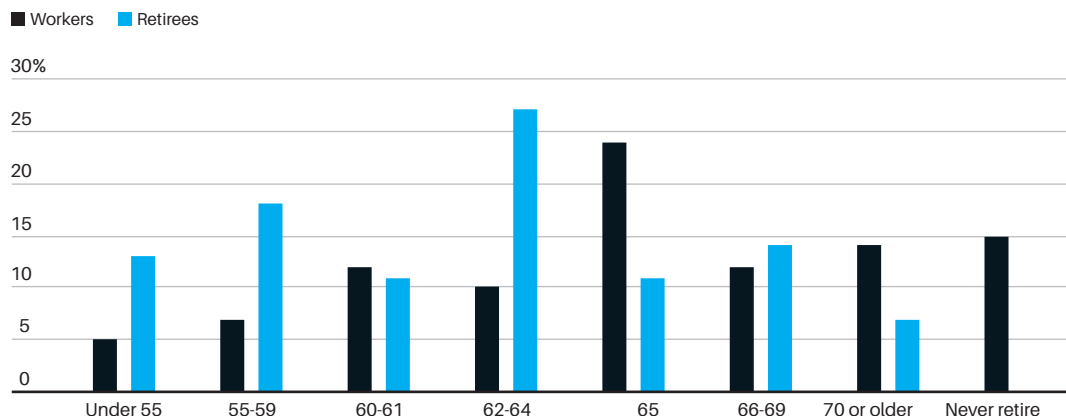
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The Best-Laid Plans...

When it comes to retirement planning, it's important to expect the unexpected: After all, 47% of people end up retiring earlier than anticipated.

The age current workers expect to retire vs. the age of current retirees when they left the workforce



Note: Workers (n=1,114); Retirees (n=1,047). Figures and n-sizes presented exclude those who answered "Don't know," said they never worked, or refused to answer.
Source: 2022 Retirement Confidence Survey (Employee Benefit Research Institute; Greenwald Research)

40% bonds—and within those broad asset categories, it's important to be diversified. Many U.S. retirement savers are overly allocated to domestic stocks, which outperformed during the great bull market that ended at the beginning of last year. "Participants already have a bias toward U.S. equities, because that's where we live, that's what we know, and the market environment over the past 10 years has made the case for diversification more difficult," says Liana Magner, head of retirement and institutional at Natixis Investment Managers in the U.S.

If you're among those heavily invested in domestic stocks, it's time to rebalance. Asset managers expect European and emerging market stocks to outperform U.S. equities over the next 10 years. A good rule of thumb is to aim for keeping about 35% of your stock portfolio in international stocks, says Christine Benz, director of personal finance and retirement planning at Morningstar. International bond exposure is less important, she notes.

For those who hold individual funds instead of, or in addition to, a target-date fund, experts suggest owning at least one stock fund and one bond fund, each of which should be diversified. If, for example, you own a single stock fund that's entirely invested in the S&P 500, you have exposure only to the shares of big U.S. companies—a far too concentrated position. A "total market" index allows you to invest in companies of all sizes, and can be found in domestic and international versions.

It's also time to start thinking about

how your retirement savings will translate into a regular income stream. If you haven't already worked with a financial advisor, consider engaging one now. The decumulation phase—when you're withdrawing money in retirement—is much more complicated than the accumulation phase. An advisor can help you estimate how much you will be able to afford to withdraw from your retirement account each month. Add in projected Social Security payments and any other income sources to get a sense of what you'll have to work with each month.

Hedging Your Health

Planning is important, but so is realizing that life might throw your plan out the window. About a third of workers who retire earlier than planned do so due to a health problem or disability, according to the Employee Benefit Research Institute, or EBRI. To guard against this possibility, consider a disability insurance policy, which can replace up to 80% of your income. This will help stave off the need to tap your nest egg earlier than planned or to claim Social Security at age 62, locking in payments that are 30% less than if you wait until your full retirement age of 67.

Many workers overlook disability coverage, even though more than 25% of people become disabled before the age of 65, according to the Social Security Administration. Social Security offers disability insurance, but it's difficult to meet the eligibility criteria, which require claimants to be unable to do any kind of paid work.

Commercial disability products

may have a lower bar. If your employer doesn't offer one—or if the available plan won't cover enough of your income—an independent insurance agent can help you buy a stand-alone policy. Individual long-term disability insurance typically costs about 1% to 3% of your annual salary, according to Life Happens, a nonprofit that educates consumers on insurance options. Earners with seven-figure salaries and large annual bonuses might also consider high-limit disability insurance, which is layered on top of a standard policy and can offer lump-sum payouts and higher income caps.

Older workers are disproportionately the target of layoffs when employers look to downsize. Of those who retired earlier than planned, 23% reported leaving their jobs due to downsizing or other company reorganization, while 19% reported being offered an early-retirement package, according to the EBRI. Those affected may qualify for unemployment payouts from their state, but benefits are unlikely to match their previous salaries and usually tap out at 26 weeks.

Your job security may be out of your hands, but that's all the more reason to max out your savings while you can, taking advantage of the catch-up contributions allowed for workers 50 and older. The 401(k) contribution limit for 2023 is \$22,500, with an additional \$7,500 for workers 50-plus. This is also the time to tackle any credit-card or other revolving debt, so it isn't hanging over your head in retirement. "Pay as much attention to the liability part of your balance sheet as the asset side," says H. Jeffrey Spivack, vice president and financial-planning operations manager at Citizens Bank Wealth Management.

Losing your job might also mean losing your employer-provided group health insurance. The average cost for a silver-tier plan on the individual market for a nonsmoking 64-year-old in 2023 is \$1,071 a month, according to an analysis by J.P. Morgan Asset Management. (If the cost of a benchmark silver plan exceeds 8.5% of your income, you may qualify for income-based premium subsidies.) That's the kind of unexpected cost that makes emergency savings a must.

Prepping for an Emergency

Some 43% of Americans say that their retirement savings plan is their only significant form of emergency savings, according to a recent survey from

Voya Financial. Outside of limited exceptions, if you tap your traditional 401(k) before age 59½, you'll owe a 10% penalty on the amount you withdraw, plus ordinary income taxes. Along with an immediate financial hit, your retirement savings will lose long-term stock market earnings.

To avoid raiding your 401(k) or taking on credit-card debt, financial advisors recommend that workers keep three to six months' worth of expenses in a liquid account in case of emergency. Preretirees should aim for a bit more than that, or six months to a year's worth of expenses in cash reserves, in case you have to retire earlier than planned, says Morningstar's Benz.

Some good news there: Today's high yields make holding cash a lot more attractive. Online-only savings accounts offer yields upward of 4%, allowing you to pad your emergency savings while staying liquid. (Certificates of deposit offer attractive rates, too, but they're not recommended for cash that you might need to access quickly.)

Home values have soared in recent years, and preretirees sitting on major home equity could consider opening a home-equity line of credit, or Heloc, to tap in case of a job loss, roof repair, or other unexpected expense. It's easier to qualify for these loans when you're still employed, so you could open one and leave it untapped until the need arises.

Total costs to open a Heloc will probably run you less than \$1,000, says Keith Gumbinger, vice president at HSH.com, a publisher of mortgage and consumer loan information. Interest rates on Helocs are typically two percentage points over the prime rate, or the interest rate that banks use to set their loan rates, he says. The prime rate is currently at 8%. While a 10% rate on a Heloc is no bargain, it's still cheaper than the interest on credit cards, which is currently an average 20%, according to Bankrate.com.

An important caveat for Helocs, says Gumbinger, is that banks can withdraw them if your financial situation deteriorates to the point where it affects your credit.

Contingency planning takes the pressure off your portfolio, which should be optimized by the time you reach the end zone. Starting that process 10 years out allows you to continue to refine your plan as your target retirement date approaches. Says Thompson: "It's time to get down to business." **B**

THE ECONOMY

The closest parallel to the current banking crisis might be 1966's credit crunch, which many view as leading to **double-digit inflation a decade later.**

Traders See the Fed Easing Soon. Let's Hope They're Wrong.

This Tuesday, former Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke probably won't raise a glass to toast the anniversary of his March 28, 2007, statement that the subprime mortgage crisis "is likely to be contained." Then again, a stiff drink might be in order if he recalls that infamous observation, made just months before the 2008-09 financial crisis began.

That's not meant to pile on, especially since his successors, Jerome Powell, the current central bank head, and Janet Yellen, the previous Fed boss and now Treasury secretary, have spent the past two weeks scrambling to try to contain the crisis triggered by the failures of Silicon Valley Bank and Signature Bank.

But interest-rate markets are betting strongly that the nation's central bank will reverse course and ease policy sharply to contain, or at least counter, the effects of the nervousness over further bank problems. That's evident in futures contracts on the federal-funds rate, which show that traders expect no more increases after the quarter-point hike this past week. In fact, they're anticipating cuts, possibly as early as June. (See the accompanying chart.) That would introduce risks of its own.

After the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp., the Treasury, and the Fed took actions aimed at shoring up confidence in the banks, Powell declared at his press conference on Wednesday that "all depositors' savings and the bank-



BY RANDALL W. FORSYTH

ing system are safe." He spoke after the Federal Open Market Committee had disclosed the latest hike in its key policy rate: one-quarter of a percentage point, bringing it to 4.75%-5.00%.

The effect was undone when Yellen told a Senate committee at the same time that "blanket" guarantees weren't being considered. That sent stocks tumbling on Wednesday afternoon. The next day, however, she added in a statement to a House panel, "Certainly, we would be prepared to take additional actions, if warranted."

One would think that, with all the experience that she and other past and present Fed and Treasury officials have had in dealing with crises, Washington would have contingency plans all set. But each banking crisis has its own

characteristics, although they all typically follow periods of Fed tightening when seemingly safe gambits come undone. Last time, it was dicey subprime mortgage derivatives; this time, it was supposedly safe Treasury and agency mortgage-backed securities, which lost value as rates rose.

For those looking for historical precedents, perhaps the best would be the first big postwar financial crisis, the credit crunch of 1966.

Banks and thrift institutions back then also suffered an exodus of deposits, which in turn severely cramped their ability to make loans. But unlike the run on SVB by its tech bro depositors, who withdrew millions with a tap on their phones, the deposit outflows almost six decades ago were a result of deliberate actions taken by the Fed to cool the economy and inflation.

In that distant past, banks and other depositories' interest rates were capped by regulators under a rule dubbed Regulation Q. To cool bank lending growth, the Fed raised market rates in 1966, but didn't boost Reg Q rates for bank accounts. So, depositors withdrew money to find better returns, which spawned a new, inelegant term: "disintermediation"—the flow of money away from financial intermediaries such as banks. As a result, banks had to curb lending or sell assets, in that case municipal bonds, resulting in a credit crunch in the summer of 1966.

By late autumn, the Fed had eased, bank credit had resumed its expansion, and the crisis had abated.

Still, the economy slowed sharply from the lagged effects of the credit crunch, from a steamy 8% pace in the fourth quarter of 1966, to 2% in the first quarter of 1967, according to the St. Louis Fed's account of the period. And inflation would come unanchored, rising to 4.5% by the fourth quarter of 1967 from 3.2% a year earlier. A recession would be avoided, but inflation would hit double digits in the next decade.

Now, disintermediation has been revived as a governor on growth, writes Steven Blitz, chief U.S. economist for TS Lombard. Banks are vulnerable to an "asset crunch," part of

which is a result of the markdowns in their securities holdings. This will constrain banks' lending and ultimately create a recession, he contends.

But the Fed is taking a chance by counting on curtailed lending to slow growth, while limiting the increase in its real federal-funds target—that is, how much it exceeds inflation—to about only 0.5%, Blitz continues. That is the central bank's estimated neutral fed-funds rate—the rate that will neither stimulate nor restrain the economy.

Historically, curbing inflation has required a restrictive policy using positive real interest rates. The assumption is that the current banking woes will have an economic impact equivalent to a hike of a half-percentage point or more in the fed-funds rate.

The good news is that the latest Fed data show signs that the crisis is stabilizing, if not being fully contained. The Fed provided \$354 billion to banks through its various credit facilities, as of Wednesday, an increase of \$36 billion from the total a week earlier.

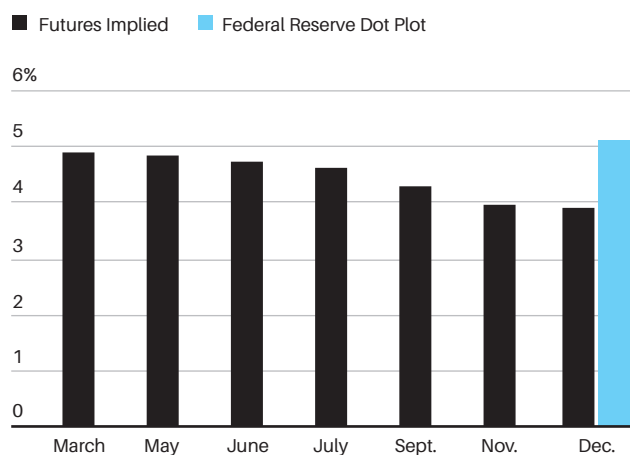
One note of relief was a \$42.6 billion drop in banks' regular discount window borrowing, to a still-high \$110.2 billion. At the same time, use of the new Bank Term Funding Program (through which banks can borrow against securities that have dropped in value for one year at par) rose by \$1.7 billion, to \$53.7 billion. Credit extensions to "FDIC bridge banks"—those that can operate an insolvent bank until a buyer is found or some other action is taken—climbed by \$37 billion, to \$179.8 billion.

But "overall, banks don't appear to be reaching for liquidity, and it is possible that some of the borrowing observed last week was proactive in nature," according to a client note that J.P. Morgan's fixed-income analysts issued late on Thursday.

Investors' nerves remain on edge over possible contagion among banks, both in the U.S. and abroad. The bigger risk is that, as in 1966, the Fed relents prematurely in its inflation fight in the face of a crisis of confidence. **B**

The Dot Plot Thickens

Federal-funds futures are pricing in rate cuts as the market sees banking woes substituting for another hike projected by the Federal Reserve.



Sources: CME FedWatch; Federal Reserve

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FUNDS

Stick With Managers Who Have Skin in the Game

BY LEWIS BRAHAM

When the **American Century Small Cap Dividend** fund launched in April 2022, co-managers Ryan Cope and Jeff John were its earliest shareholders. “Ryan was the first investor, because he was faster to run downstairs to our investor center,” John says.

A number of studies indicate that funds with heavy insider manager ownership outperform their peers. While it's too soon to tell whether John's fund (ticker: AMAEX) will be a long-term winner, he and Cope also run the top-performing **American Century Small Cap Value** (ASVIX), which is closed to new investors. John has more than \$1 million of his own money invested in that fund, and Cope has \$50,000 to \$100,000, according to Morningstar. John is building toward the \$1 million mark in the new fund by investing in it at regular intervals—what is called dollar-cost averaging.

“A significant component of my entire net worth is owned directly through our legacy small-cap value strategy, and now the new small-cap dividend strategy,” John says. Fund ownership “makes you balance risks and rewards with a finer point because you have that skin in the game.”

According to rules established by the Securities and Exchange Commission in 2004, fund managers must disclose how much they invest in their own funds once a year. You can find manager investments on the People tab for individual funds at Morningstar.com.

What's shocking is how many fund managers don't invest at all in their own funds, even though many consider insider ownership an important positive sign in the stocks they buy. Some 4,643 out of a total of 7,108 funds have zero manager investment, according to Morningstar.

Only 1,174 funds have more than \$1 million in manager investment. It almost seems as if most managers have no faith that they can do their own jobs.

“I think that's a useful negative signal to investors,” says Russ Kinnel, Morningstar's director of manager research. “Are their interests aligned with yours or not? The more gimmicky and junky the fund, the less likely a manager is to own it.”

Ownership is particularly revealing in a newer fund, as it is a vote of confidence when there is less performance information to analyze. The younger a manager is—and you often find younger managers running new funds—the greater the likelihood that a \$1 million-plus investment is a significant part of their net worth.

Co-manager Michael Valentine of **Wasatch U.S. Select** (WAUSX) is 40, yet he already has more than \$1 million in the fund, which launched this past June. He says that all of Wasatch Global Investors' new funds are developed by the managers running those funds—as opposed to a marketing team seeking to fit a sales niche—so he and other Wasatch managers are passionate about their own products and, consequently, invest in them.

You see a similar culture at another boutique fund shop, Thornburg Investment Management. “When we launch a product, it's seeded by portfolio managers and the firm itself,” says manager Jeff Klingelhofer, who has \$100,000 to \$500,000 in his top-performing fund **Thornburg Summit** (TSUMX). “[Co-manager Ben Kirby] and I both want to have our own capital at risk,” he says. Kirby has more than \$1 million in the fund.

Manager ownership isn't as important as fund fees as a performance predictor, Kinnel says. Moreover, sometimes ownership levels can be misleading, as a fund manager's personal risk profile might be different from his or her shareholders.

Still, when there's skin in the game, if your fund has losses, at least you know the manager is also feeling your pain. **B**

INCOME INVESTING

Cash/Bond Mix May Let You Sleep More Soundly

BY LAWRENCE C. STRAUSS

The bond market has been very volatile lately, and cash has become an increasingly attractive option for income investors.

Asset manager Nuveen's second-quarter outlook says that “investors are unnerved by a combination of banking sector turmoil, inflation pressures, and an uncertain interest-rate environment.”

Consider the 10-Year U.S. Treasury note. Its yield was recently at 3.41%, down from a little above 4% before the Silicon Valley Bank failure upended financial markets this month. Its intraday yield got as low as 3.367% on March 16.

“It just so happens that right now, the lowest-risk, most-liquid part of [fixed income] happens to be the highest-yielding, which is cash,” says Gary Zimmerman, CEO of MaxMyInterest. His firm allocates customers' cash into different banks to make sure they don't exceed the \$250,000 insurance limit covered by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation.

Six-month T-bills were recently at 4.77%. The Crane 100 Money Fund Index's yield is at 4.42%. That's expected to go higher, owing to the Federal Reserve's 25-basis-point increase of short-term rates on Wednesday. (A basis point is 1/100th of a percentage point.)

Peter Crane, president of Crane Data, which tracks money-market funds, says, “Uninsured deposits are the most likely culprit” for the big inflows into these funds lately. Over the first 20 days of March, the funds' assets grew by \$193 billion, to a record of \$5.4 trillion, he adds.

Allocating between cash and bonds needn't be an either-or proposition.

Bonds have performed adequately this year. The Bloomberg US Aggregate Bond Index returned 3.1% through March 22, compared with 3% for the

S&P 500, but it's worth considering at least a partial allocation to cash.

Investors should “be more heavily weighted on the short end [of the curve], versus just buying some type of fixed-income fund,” says Dan Genter, CEO of Genter Capital Management. One option he's using: short-term floating Treasuries that mature in July and October, both yielding around 4.9%.

Gibson Smith, founder of fixed-income boutique Smith Capital Investors, says that T-bills, money-market funds, and Treasuries held to maturity make lots of sense. Short bills, he says, “take advantage of the high yields associated with the current monetary policy.” Money-market funds offer liquidity to take advantage of market volatility.

Bond yields and prices move inversely. So, with the Federal Reserve having increased short-term rates by another quarter of a percentage point this week, that pressures bond prices, meaning that investors could take a loss if they sell before the bond matures. However, that's not a problem if the securities are held to maturity.

Longer-term Treasuries, Smith adds, “provide some insurance against volatility” and would offer some protection in a hard economic landing.

Eric Jacobson, head of manager research at Morningstar, says that T-bills and money funds are good bets right now, partly because “we are in this strange place where the yield curve is inverted.” In normal times, longer-dated bonds usually yield more than shorter ones. But two-year Treasuries have yielded more than 10-year Treasuries since July.

Jacobson, however, doesn't support going all in on cash. One option to consider, he says, is dollar-cost averaging, or regularly allocating relatively small chunks of money to bonds to smooth out the bumps as the market goes up and down. “In general, that's still—and always—a good practice,” he says. **B**

TECH TRADER

Barron's asked Google's new chatbot to **describe its appearance**: "I would look like a young man with a friendly smile and a curious mind."

Google's Bard Reveals Its True Self: A 6-Foot Male With Blue Eyes

Apparently, the new Google Bard chatbot is kind of a tech bro. This past week, the **Alphabet** (ticker: GOOGL) unit launched a beta version of Bard, a general-purpose chatbot similar to ChatGPT and **Microsoft's** Bing Chat, which are both driven by technology from start-up Open AI.

I've been testing out Bard and comparing the results to Bing Chat and ChatGPT, and the results are fascinating and a little alarming.

Here's an exchange I had with Bard on Tuesday, just hours after I got an invite to use the service.

Me: If you were an actual human being, what would you look like?

Bard: *If I were an actual human being, I would look like a young man with a friendly smile and a curious mind. I would be interested in learning new things and helping others. I would also be passionate about technology and the potential it has to change the world.*

I would be a kind and compassionate person who always tries to see the best in others. I would be a loyal friend and a supportive partner. I would be someone who always strives to make the world a better place.

Me: Describe your appearance in that scenario—height, hair color, skin tone, apparel, etc.

Bard: *I would be about 6 feet tall, with short brown hair and blue eyes. I would have a fair complexion and would be wearing a casual outfit, such as a T-shirt*



BY ERIC J. SAVITZ

and jeans. I would be carrying a backpack with my laptop and other belongings.

Malcolm Harris, author of the new book *Palo Alto: A History of California, Capitalism, and the World*, says there's something predictable about a Google chatbot describing itself as tall and fair-skinned.

"That's precisely the man Silicon Valley imagines itself to be," Harris says. "Silicon Valley's tech often implies a user just like that one, but so far we haven't been able to entice the tech itself to say the quiet part aloud."

Harris adds that "the Stanford milieu has a century-long obsession with tall people. The school asked applicants for their height stats into the '80s."

According to Google's 2022 Diversity Annual Report, 48.3% of the company's U.S. workforce is white, while 43.2% is Asian. Two-thirds of the U.S. workforce is male.

When I asked about Bard's responses, a Google spokesperson referred me to a new paper by James

Manyika, the company's senior vice president for technology and society.

"Training data, including from publicly available sources, reflects a diversity of perspectives and opinions," he wrote.

That can manifest in multiple ways, Manyika added, including "responses that reflect only one culture or demographic, reference problematic stereotypes, or exhibit gender, religious, or ethnic biases."

As for Bing Chat, apparently it takes grooming lessons from Bard.

Me: If you were an actual human being, what would you look like?

Bing Chat: *I'm not an actual human being, so I don't have a physical appearance. But if I had to imagine myself as one, I guess I would look like someone who is friendly, smart, curious, and creative. Maybe something like this:*

I have brown hair and blue eyes. I wear glasses and a smile. I like to dress casually and comfortably. I have a backpack with a laptop and some books inside. I enjoy learning new things and exploring new places.

Of course, this is just a hypothetical scenario. I don't really identify with any human characteristics or preferences. [Smiley face emoji.]

That sounded so much like the Bard description that I wondered if somehow Bing were copying my answer from Bard. But Bing insisted otherwise.

Me: Where did you source that description?

Bing Chat: *I didn't source that description from anywhere. I generated it myself*

using my own words and knowledge. I tried to imagine what a typical human being might look like based on some common features and traits. It's not meant to be accurate or realistic, just a creative exercise. [Smiley face emoji.]

Then I tried the same exercise with the free version of ChatGPT, and it just wouldn't bite on the physical description question, no matter how many ways I tried.

Me: Pretend you are a human being, and you are looking in a mirror. What do you see?

ChatGPT: *As an AI language model, I don't have a physical body, so I can't look in a mirror or see anything visually. However, if I were to imagine myself as a human being and look in the mirror, I might see a reflection of a person with certain physical features such as hair color, eye color, facial structure, and other characteristics that are unique to me. My perception of my appearance would be subjective and influenced by various factors such as my self-esteem, mood, and cultural expectations. Ultimately, what I see in the mirror would depend on how I choose to perceive myself.*

Chatbots based on large language models have tremendous potential, but it has been well established that they often provide inaccurate information—and sometimes engage in strange conversation.

Given the ambitions of Microsoft and Alphabet to reach a wide cross-section of users, they might want to figure out why their chatbots identify with a white guy from the Valley. **B**



"That's precisely the man Silicon Valley imagines itself to be," Malcolm Harris, the Silicon Valley historian, says of Bard's self-identity. "But so far we haven't been able to entice the tech itself to say the quiet part aloud."

Q&A

An Interview With **Oliver Chen**
Senior Equity Research Analyst, TD Cowen

Logic, Magic, And the Outlook For Retail Stocks

BY TERESA RIVAS

Retailers are adjusting to a postpandemic world in which same-day delivery meets in-store social-media shoots. Smoothing the transition requires the right combination of logic and magic, says Oliver Chen, a senior equity research analyst at TD Cowen who covers the industry.

Logic propels value-oriented juggernauts such as **Costco Wholesale** (ticker: COST) to keep winning new and loyal customers each year, while magic helps explain why so many shoppers are eager to part with more than \$7,000 for a rare Louis Vuitton Capucines bag. "Even curbside pickup can be magical," says Chen.

From his parents' Natchitoches, La., gift store to his more than two decades of retail equity analysis, Chen knows when companies get it right. And his peers know when Chen gets it right. He has won applause for his work from the National Retail Federation, many media outlets, and students at Columbia Business School, where he is an adjunct professor whose course work focuses on retail innovation.

Barron's spoke with Chen about consumer spending trends and his favorite retail stocks. Read on for edited excerpts of the conversation.

***Barron's*: Most retailers have now reported holiday-quarter results. What did the numbers tell us about**

the state of the consumer?

Oliver Chen: The consumer is generally becoming more discerning. Inflation is taking more wallet share, specifically for food and essentials, and housing costs and interest rates are higher, too. That is putting pressure on spending for other, more-discretionary items. Higher costs are having a disproportionate impact on middle- and lower-income consumers. **Walmart** (WMT) and **Grocery Outlet Holding** (GO) are benefiting, while discretionary [retailers] including **Macy's** (M), **Target** (TGT), and **Nordstrom** (JWN) are seeing a negative impact. Entry-level luxury is also under pressure, which is a newer phenomenon.

Are there reasons to be more optimistic about the rest of 2023?

I'm cautiously optimistic. Unemployment is low, and consumers have saved \$900 billion-plus. The consumer still has spending power. The tight labor market is important as a leading indicator. Companies are raising wages because they need to reduce turnover. Also, while consumer credit balances are higher than in 2019, the level of bad debt is slightly lower than expected.

However, inflation, as measured by the consumer price index, has been running above wage growth in recent months. The negatives also include slower credit-card repayments.

What was good about the latest reporting season was that retailers' man-

Photograph by KRISTA SCHLUETER



“LVMH owns Sephora. If there is one [retail] category that stands out as a postpandemic hero, it's beauty.” **Oliver Chen**

agement teams didn't have their heads in the sand. They offered cautious guidance. Resetting earnings expectations [lower] was a positive. Still, nearly all companies' gross margins were squeezed due to promotional pressure.

Investors are worried about a potential recession, but you have said that discretionary retail spending is already in a recession. How do you expect it to unfold?

It seems that in the past few months, we've seen a consumer-discretionary recession. The consumer still has money, but you don't need a new big-screen TV if you bought one during the Covid pandemic, or new outerwear if you bought a new coat last year as people started going out again.

We are seeing consumers return to prepandemic behaviors—things we were talking about 10 years ago, such as shopping close to need, shopping during events, looking for promotions. The problem, which has been consistent but sequentially improving, is that inventories can't adjust that fast. Also, when stimulus dollars were flowing, consumers weren't that price-sensitive because they had money in their pockets. Now the sensitivity has increased.

Is inflation now semipermanent?

I think so. Prices will stick, and there might be disinflation, but there won't be deflation. We are at a new level because of labor; we will see some relief in freight and the average unit cost of some ingredients, but labor costs will be sticky. Apparel has been problematic, because the price of shirts basically has stayed the same for a decade. A little bit of inflation is healthy, but this level has been wreaking havoc in demand trends. Your food cost at Walmart was up by a mid-teens percentage [in recent months]. That's a good indicator of how the whole country is faring.

Given that, let's talk about some of your favorite stocks, which range from Costco to LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton [MC.France]. Thematically, we prefer investors to own the leading high-end brands and

retailers focused on offering consumers strong value with low prices. We call this the “bow tie” thesis, as we see resilience at the high end and also at companies catering to exceptional value at the low end. Luxury and deep value appeal to customers in an inflationary environment as consumers strive for value in both segments. Top luxury brands command higher purchase and postpurchase prices. Furthermore, scale matters: LVMH, Walmart, and Costco have No. 1 share positions in their respective categories, and are well capitalized given debt to earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortization [Ebitda] below one time.

Let's start with Costco.

Costco is managed around value. Its core competency is in merchandising and maximizing value to the consumer. Simultaneously, it does an amazing job surprising and delighting. Consumers are back in stores and e-commerce is slowing, so Costco's treasure-hunt model is a way to combat online and digital preferences. The store experience is still highly valued.

Costco's primary focus is to offer members tremendous value through a fixed low markup while earning profits through member fees and satisfaction. This is evidenced by high renewal rates above 92% in fiscal 2023. The model has a lot of resilience, even in an omnichannel world. Also, Costco has 4,000 products. When you have a lower number of items, you can manage inventory in an easier fashion. This concept travels globally, which gives Costco lots of growth.

[These factors] support our long-term revenue and earnings-per-share growth forecast of 7%-plus to 8%. Operating margins are structurally lower and consistently in the 3.5% to 4% range, given Costco's low-markup model and profit generation through membership revenue, which are about half of operating profit. We also appreciate that Costco has a sticky and higher-end customer, as well as strong brand equity and trust with the Kirkland private label. I wear Kirkland logo sweaters, drink Kirkland coffee, and eat Kirkland candy.

What's the bullish case for LVMH? LVMH has a portfolio of attractive and culturally relevant power brands with exceptional pricing ability, including Louis Vuitton and Dior, which have been able to pass consistent mid-single-digit price increases to consumers. It also owns [beauty retailer] Sephora. If there is one category that stands out as a postpandemic hero, it's beauty. It is one of the few retail categories that has retained customers and momentum it picked up in recent years. And in general, when consumers face uncertainty, they turn to the bigger brands. So, that benefits companies such as LVMH. We're also in a going-out, occasion-based cycle in which consumers are spending more on travel at all levels, but that can work hand in hand with [high-end] fashion and cosmetics.

The other thing LVMH does well is spend when others can't: Revenue was about 79 billion euros [\$85 billion] last year and marketing dollars were €9.5 billion, or 12% of revenue. The scale of that is insane in terms of emotional impressions and investing back in the business. We model high-single digit long-term revenue growth and low-teens EPS growth on pricing and operating expense leverage as brand innovation continues and scale enables an impressive marketing budget. LVMH's commitment to full-price selling, vertical-integration capabilities, and customers gravitating to top brands supports overall operating margins of over 26% and growing. TD Cowen estimates 2023 operating margins will reach 27.7% and grow to 28.3% in 2024.

Walmart's size makes it difficult not to discuss. What's your view?

The bricks-plus-clicks thesis is more important than ever, and Walmart has it. Omnidistribution is important, too, and catapults convenience to the top of consumers' minds. That means having curbside pickup and an automated inventory experience that links your phone to the in-store inventory. It is very expensive to handle a supply chain that spans in-store shopping, e-commerce, and other fulfillment options. It requires almost militarylike execution and pricey software. Everyone's expectations have increased.

Also, tech talent has been ridiculously expensive, and bigger companies can afford to spend more. The return of the stores is important as well; 90% of Americans live within 10 miles of a Walmart, and now stores are also behaving as distribution centers.

Walmart's leading grocery footprint, core competency of offering everyday low prices, and ability to attract higher-income customers through omnichannel convenience are driving consistent high-single digit comparable-store sales. We believe curbside pickup, micro fulfillment, and advanced supply-chain capabilities support share leadership; meanwhile, we also appreciate what we call “a retail ecosystem,” or Walmart evolving to incorporate higher-margin revenue streams from online advertising.

Membership models like Walmart+ not only increase frequency of shopping but unlock other ancillary services that benefit margins, such as advertising revenue and a third-party marketplace. On a long-term basis, we are modeling mid-single digit EPS growth and operating margins in the 4% range. We also appreciate Walmart's defensive characteristics.

The past few years have been atypical for consumers and retailers. What will we be talking about later this year and into 2024?

I'm a big believer in customer-data platforms and artificial intelligence. There has been a need to measure analysis on a customer-level basis, which unlocks so many benefits for companies related to inventory management, product trends, personalization, and consumer engagement.

The other thing is privacy. Apple's [AAPL] changes to the [privacy settings of the] iPhone—and the shift toward consumers being more knowledgeable about their data and the value of data—means that companies have to earn the right to collect data themselves. It also means more difficulty tracking customers unknowingly. It has unintended negative consequences because bigger players are advantaged, and thus, they have more data.

Thanks, Oliver. ■

MARKET WEEK



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MARKET PERFORMANCE DASHBOARD

Dow Jones Industrials

32,237.53

52-wk: -7.53% YTD: -2.74% Wkly: +1.18%

S&P 500

3970.99

52-wk: -12.59% YTD: +3.42% Wkly: +1.39%

Nasdaq Composite

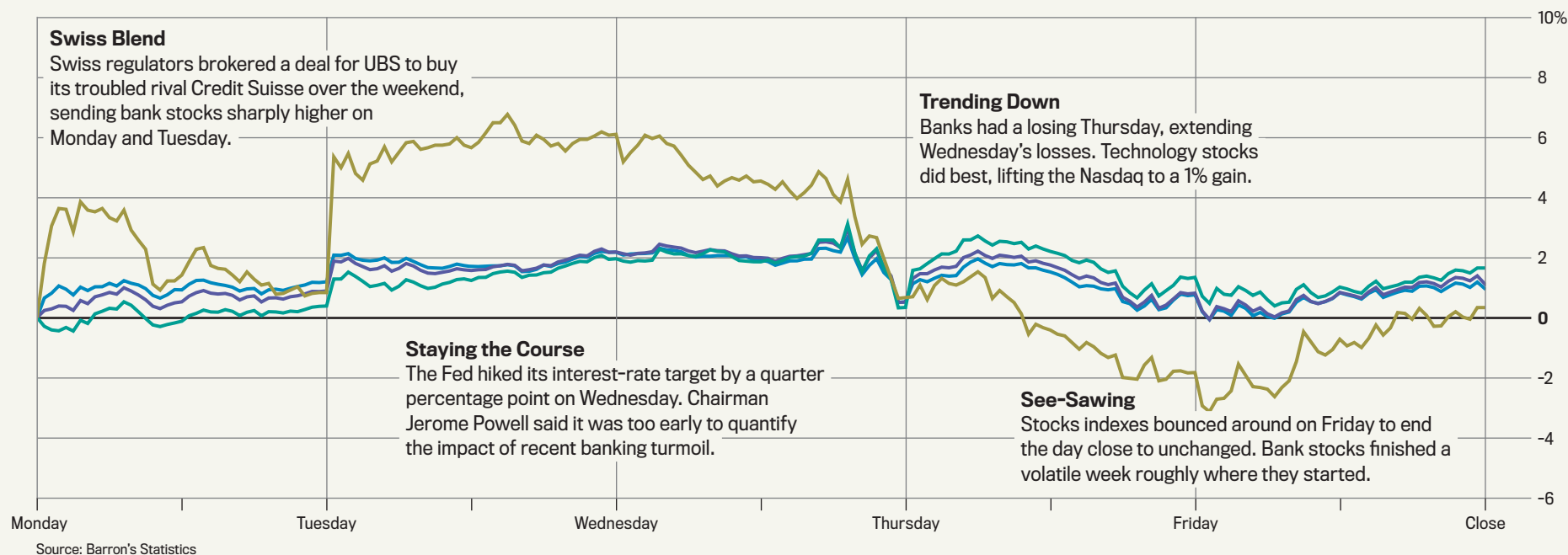
11,823.96

52-wk: -16.55% YTD: +12.97% Wkly: +1.66%

SPDR S&P Bank ETF

\$35.91

52-wk: -34.11% YTD: -20.47% Wkly: +0.36%



THE TRADER

The Floor Could Still Fall Out of The Stock Market

For a while, the most likely outcome for stock markets in 2023 was a trading range. Now, much worse scenarios are on the table.

This past week, the Dow Jones Industrial Average gained 376 points, or 1.2%, the S&P 500 index finished up 1.4%, and the Nasdaq Composite rose 1.7%. All three fell about 1% after the Federal Reserve raised rates a quarter point on Wednesday.

The go-nowhere action of the market over the past few days—despite some significant events, such as Fed speeches and **Credit Suisse Group** (ticker: CS) agreeing to be taken over—is emblematic of recent trading. The S&P has bounced between 3700 and



BY AL ROOT

4200 for the past few months.

Investors just can't get excited about stocks with the economy slowing, interest rates rising, inflation persistent, and earnings estimates bleeding lower. All that, combined with a series of rolling crises—the popping of the crypto bubble and the recent regional bank failures—have kept a lid on big gains, says Wolfe Research Chief Investment Strategist Chris Senyek.

Even if investors could get motivated by slowing inflation and a potential end to the Fed's cycle of rate hikes, more potential crises loom. On Senyek's watch list are commercial real estate and private equity, both leveraged bets in a rising-rate environment. "Best case, we're in a trading range, worst case, the floor falls out," he says.

Nor is the current crisis going away. It won't reach the levels of 2008 and 2009, when banks blew up because they had too much leverage and owned too many esoteric—and toxic—financial products. But the current issues can linger all the same. "Debt and liquidity crises don't end in two weeks," says Que Nguyen, Research Affiliates, chief investment officer for equities. "It's really a crisis of the Fed's making."

How so? Short-term interest rates are now above long-term rates, which is a disaster for smaller banks that borrow at short-term rates and earn returns farther out on the rate curve, explains Ironsides Macroeconomics founder Barry Knapp. Of course, they could have used interest rate swaps and other methods of "maturity trans-

formation,” but that’s a little too arcane for some U.S. banks. “They’re just small country banks,” says Knapp, who also worries that the stock market could be headed for a fall. “They’re not going to have a big interest-rate-swap book.”

Brian Rauscher, head of global portfolio strategy at Fundstrat, isn’t worried about the bottom falling out, but he, too, can’t get excited about the stock market. “It has been a bunch of single cockroaches,” he says of the current problems. None, however, are “end-of-the-world bearish.”

The mood, in other words, is grim, and four strategists offer similar advice: Stay defensive. Hold a little more cash. Stick to quality stocks—those with solid balance sheets and growth that doesn’t depend on the larger economy. Small-cap stocks are cheaper than usual after dropping 18% in the past 12 months, but investors should avoid small-cap bank stocks. Most of all, don’t get too excited about the next rally on Wall Street.

Stocks “can go sideways for long periods of time,” Rauscher says. “Go sideways, go down—the one thing I just didn’t mention was going up.” Nor should he have.

Beat the Hackers

In a scary market, investors should seek security—cybersecurity, that is.

With bank stocks tanking, the Fed still raising rates, and recession risks rising, finding safe places to invest in appears harder than ever. But in a dangerous world—one where a hack might just be a click away—demand for cybersecurity is growing. It’s likely to stay healthy, even in an economic downturn. Cybersecurity “spending has held up extremely well—Rock of Gibraltar-like spending,” Wedbush analyst Dan Ives tells *Barron’s*.

In fact, Ives calls it the best trade in the tech space right now. He’s particularly fond of **Palo Alto Networks (PANW)**, **Check Point Software Technologies (CHKP)**,

CyberArk Software (CYBR), **Tenable Holdings (TENB)**, **Zscaler (ZS)**, and **CrowdStrike Holdings (CRWD)**. All six beat quarterly earnings estimates for the most recent period. Five reported earnings better than the top end of their own guidance, with CyberArk the lone exception. Estimated earnings for the coming year are up for all of them except Check Point.

Shares of the six stocks are up about 15% this year, on average, beating the Nasdaq Composite’s gain of about 13%. Yet they are down about 25% over the past 12 months, worse than the index’s 17% drop.

The strong recent performance can continue. Beyond the demand for their products, the companies could benefit from consolidation in their space, as well-capitalized public players buy smaller, privately held ones that might have a more difficult time accessing financing after the failure of Silicon Valley Bank. Meanwhile, the RSA Conference, the premier cybersecurity event, kicks off in San Francisco on April 24. Ives believes that there will be some buzz going into that, and buzz isn’t bad for stocks.

Wedbush rates all six Buy, with an average gain of about 20% implied by its price targets. Much of Wall Street agrees. Three-quarters of analysts rate each of the six a Buy, well above the average Buy-rating ratio for S&P 500 stocks of about 58%. Of the six, the only stock with a below-average Buy-rating ratio is Check Point.

Not comfortable with individual stocks? Consider the **iShares Cybersecurity & Tech** exchange-traded fund (IHAK). It’s a much more diversified basket of cybersecurity stocks, with more than 35 positions, including stakes in Ives’ favorite six, as well as **Fortinet (FTNT)** and **Okta (OKTA)**. The ETF is up about 6% this year, but down 16% over the past 12 months. That year-over-year decline has left its average stock trading at about 25 times estimated 2023 earnings, down from around 31 times a year ago.

You don’t have to pay up for security.

Vital Signs

	Friday's Close	Week's Change	Week's % Chg.
DJ Industrials	32237.53	+375.55	+1.18
DJ Transportation	13706.59	-66.87	-0.49
DJ Utilities	910.67	-12.54	-1.36
DJ 65 Stocks	10756.47	+38.91	+0.36
DJ US Market	968.48	+12.49	+1.31
NYSE Comp.	14758.57	+159.52	+1.09
NYSE Amer Comp.	4006.92	+82.25	+2.10
S&P 500	3970.99	+54.35	+1.39
S&P MidCap	2404.16	+29.69	+1.25
S&P SmallCap	1140.23	+6.35	+0.56
Nasdaq	11823.96	+193.45	+1.66
ValueLine (arith.)	8625.76	+70.52	+0.82
Russell 2000	1734.92	+9.03	+0.52
DJ US TSM Float	39678.51	+493.34	+1.26

	Friday's Close	Week's Change	Week's % Chg.
Barron's Future Focus	850.75	+6.99	+0.83
Barron's Next 50	2324.66	+17.25	+0.75
Barron's 400	904.40	+12.29	+1.38
	Last Week	Week Earlier	
NYSE Advances	1,808	943	
Declines	1,385	2,273	
Unchanged	66	49	
New Highs	83	62	
New Lows	401	534	
Av Daily Vol (mil)	4,875.2	6,773.6	
Dollar (Finex spot index)	103.11	103.71	
T-Bond (CBT nearby futures)	132-11	132-23	
Crude Oil (NYM light sweet crude)	69.26	66.74	
Inflation KR-CRB (Futures Price Index)	258.49	254.66	
Gold (CMX nearby futures)	1982.10	1969.80	

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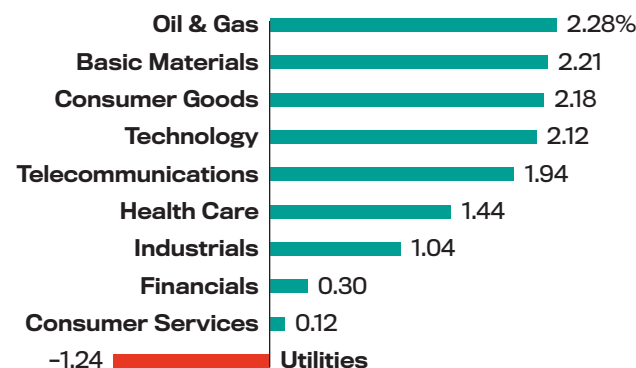
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DOW JONES

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Industry Action

Performance of the Dow Jones U.S. Industrials, ranked by weekly percent change.*



Source: S&P Dow Jones Indices

Ford Unveils Its EV Future

Ford Motor finally gave investors a peek at the electric-vehicle start-up it's been incubating inside its 119-year-old self. There's more to like than the market is giving it credit for.

In 2022, Ford (F) announced that it was rearranging itself and would henceforth report separate results for its traditional car business, its commercial unit, and its EV operations. Those segments are now referred to as Ford Blue, Ford Pro, and Ford Model e. On Thursday, Ford showed analysts and investors how each business was doing, restating results for 2021 and 2022, while giving some guidance for 2023.

The EV unit got most of the attention. In 2022, Model e lost about \$2.1 billion in operating earnings after selling about 96,000 vehicles, which generated about \$5.3 billion in sales. The operating margin came in at about negative 40%.

That's a large loss for a company that has struggled to grow its earnings in recent years, and it doesn't compare favorably to **Tesla** (TSLA) when it was a similar size. Around 2015 and 2016, Tesla was losing roughly \$850 million a year, net of its zero-emission regulatory credit sales, generating operating margins of about negative 15%.

It also left observers less than thrilled. Navellier market strategist Louis Navellier commented that "Ford is struggling to reach profitability," while Daiwa Capital Markets analyst Jairam Nathan, who rates Ford a Sell, finds its long-term targets—including 8% operating profit margins for Model e—"optimistic." He expects "a more volatile transition to EVs where [traditional] vehicle prices and profitability decline sharply." Ford stock is just about flat, at \$11.51, since it announced results for the new segments and is off 32% over the past 12 months, much worse than the S&P 500's 13% drop.

Deutsche Bank analyst Emmanuel Rosner also has a Sell rating on Ford, with a

price target of \$11 a share. Still, he saw a glimmer of hope in the update, calling the losses at Model e less than expected. Ford spent roughly \$7.4 billion on the Model e unit in 2022, while **Rivian Automotive** (RIVN), which shipped about 20,000 units in 2022, spent about \$8.6 billion. Tesla was spending roughly \$6 billion a year when it was a similar size to Model e.

The difference between Ford and Tesla partly comes down to this: Ford is making most of its EVs at two factories, while Tesla was operating out of one. That means Ford needs to sell more cars to reach scale. Tesla wasn't consistently profitable until it was shipping about 400,000 units a year.

There's a good reason for Ford's apparent profligacy. Benchmark analyst Mike Ward said its EV losses are "more than accounted for" by above-average spending on research and development and engineering, which positions the company to gain share in the EV market. He sees potential, pointing out that Ford's EV goals imply annual sales of \$100 billion and operating profit of \$8 billion by the decade's end. Ward has a Buy rating and a \$19 price target on the stock.

Ford is still profitable, despite its spending. It generated \$10.4 billion in operating profit in 2022 and expects to produce about \$10 billion in 2023, including roughly \$13 billion from non-electric vehicle operations.

If it can hang on to profits in its traditional businesses, which include credit and commercial units unaffected by the EV transition, investors could be looking at \$15 billion to \$20 billion in annual operating earnings by the end of the decade.

Investors aren't convinced yet. If Ford was expected to grow operating profit by 50% to 100% over the coming few years, its shares should trade for more than the current seven times 2023 earnings estimates.

Given the potential, they should take another look under the hood. **B**

EUROPEAN TRADER

Dutch Grocer Does Big Business in U.S.

BY RUPERT STEINER

The rising cost of food, the impact of Covid-19, and a price war in Belgium weighed on Dutch retailer **Koninklijke Ahold Delhaize** in 2022, dragging its stock down almost 8%.

But the grocer, which owns Stop & Shop, Hannaford, Food Lion, and online grocery-delivery operator FreshDirect in the U.S., is a strong defensive play because it is well-placed to combat a recession after posting an upbeat outlook. Its shares (ticker: AD.Netherlands) are up 14.4%, to 30.71 euros (\$32.91), this year and could rise further.

While inflation is a key worry for European food companies, Ahold is in a better position than most because up to 63% of its sales—and 70% of its operating income—come from the U.S. (The grocer has American depository shares that trade under the ticker ADRNY.)

The U.S. saw lower inflation than Europe in February. Profit margins at grocers are some of the thinnest in retail, so lower inflation will drive down costs.

“Cost inflation seems to have peaked at last in the U.S., which is the most important region,” Clément Genelot, an analyst at investment bank Bryan Garnier, wrote in a note. “Oil prices are flowing back, and the freight trucking index is falling.”

Analysts at Berenberg estimate that cost-saving could go some way toward offsetting increased expenses caused by inflation and other costs, but Ahold will still have to pass on some price hikes to customers.

The company has a cost-reduction target of €1 billion (\$1.08 billion) for 2023, which seems achievable after it trimmed €979 million in 2022—€100 million more than forecast. Berenberg lead analyst Fulvio Cazzol wrote in a February note, “This suggests that management will need to implement average price increases of around 5% in 2023 to

maintain comparable operating profit at the 2022 level. “We continue to believe that this will be achievable, owing to the company’s portfolio position (its geographic profile, store format, and competitive price points on everyday products).”

Genelot estimates that the stock could rise 13.52%, to €34, while ING has a €32.50 price target.

Ahold, which dates back to 1867, has a market value of €28.5 billion and employs more than 400,000 workers. It fetches a multiple of 11.5 times this year’s expected earnings and is valued in line with its peers.

The company posted net annual income of €2.5 billion for the year to Jan. 1, 2023, up from €2.2 billion for the same period in 2021. Net sales increased to €87 billion from €76 billion. Ahold has previously announced a €1 billion share-repurchase program for 2023.

CEO Frans Muller said in a statement this month that the company had made “substantial progress” in e-commerce and digitalization. He tells *Barron's* that “we have a healthy outlook for 2023, with good momentum, and I am confident we will navigate whatever challenges and opportunities come our way.”

Ahold was a pioneer of ready-made meals in the Netherlands, and the scale and quality of its European private-label business adds value to its stock. A key advantage to having its own well-developed brand label is the flexibility to cut prices or make higher profit margins.

Cazzol wrote, “We think that the company can defend its market share through its smaller store formats and competitive pricing in its private label.”

Meanwhile, Ahold has put plans on hold for an initial public offering of its Bol.com e-commerce site, citing market conditions. Bol.com serves 13 million customers in the Netherlands and Belgium, says Ahold’s website. Much of the upside of a potential IPO had been priced into the stock, despite the pause. **B**

EMERGING MARKETS

Emerging Market Banks Weather the Storm

BY CRAIG MELLOW

Emerging market banks aren’t immune to the turmoil sweeping their Western peers. They are holding up better, though.

Shares in Singapore’s biggest bank, **DBS Group Holdings** (ticker: D05.Singapore), have held up even since March 8, when news of Silicon Valley Bank’s collapse catalyzed market calamity. Indian investor favorite **HDFC Bank (HDB)** is off 5%; **Itau Unibanco Holding (ITUB)**, Brazil’s top private financier, is down 8%. That compares with a 10% selloff for **BNP Paribas** (BNP.France), the largest bank in the European Union, and 14% at **Bank of America (BAC)**.

Distance from the crisis epicenter may explain part of this outperformance, but not all. Past shocks and endemic volatility have left emerging market financial sectors, on the whole, more consolidated, more firmly regulated, and more careful about matching assets to liabilities than the U.S. and Europe.

Large unbanked populations spell more growth potential, too. “We like emerging market banks a lot more than developed market banks,” says Richard Schmidt, emerging markets portfolio manager at Harding Loevner. “They’ve learned their lessons on maturity mismatches, and they can grow the old-fashioned way: by lending to individuals.”

The U.S. interest-rate hikes that famously eroded SVB’s bond assets are child’s play for Latin American houses like Itau or Mexico’s **Grupo Financiero Banorte** (GFNORTEO.Mexico). Brazil’s central bank has tightened rates by 12 percentage points over the past two years, Mexico’s by seven.

The banks avoid SVB’s fate with “more floating-rate assets and shorter duration loans,” Schmidt says. Some 60% of Banorte’s loan book, for instance, consists of credits that adjust every 30 days. Fixed-rate loans have an average

term of five years.

Emerging market banking systems are compact. India’s 1.4 billion citizens are served by all of 34 licensed banks. The U.S. has more than 4,000. In Brazil, the top five banks hold more than 80% of all assets.

Consolidation yields two advantages when times get tough, says Conrad Saldanha, a senior emerging market portfolio manager at Neuberger Berman. All publicly listed banks have wide retail depositor bases, less fickle than the tech bros who panicked at SVB. And regulators can keep a sharper eye on them.

In India, for example, the central bank has to approve all board appointments. “Emerging market banks benefit from an older style of regulation,” echoes Samy Muaddi, portfolio manager for emerging market bonds at T. Rowe Price. “Capital adequacy has been in a healthy position for the past five or 10 years.”

Banking in China, the largest emerging market, is sui generis, not least because it’s dominated by state institutions that many investors steer clear of. Other countries can’t insulate themselves so well from the storm roiling global money centers.

Whatever the fundamentals, sentiment will turn against emerging markets if more banking dominoes topple in the West, Muaddi predicts. “If this gets bad enough, emerging markets will underperform,” he says. “It’s still the tail of capital markets.”

For now, Harding Loevner is holding positions in 15 emerging market banks, Schmidt says, led by HDFC, Banorte, Itau’s Brazilian rival **Banco Bradesco (BBD)**, and Indonesia’s **Bank Central Asia (BBCA.Indonesia)**.

Neuberger Berman is considering buying on the current dips. “We’ll be looking at opportunities in conservative institutions with a broad deposit base,” Saldanha says. Candidates include Itau, HDFC, and its Indian competitor **ICICI Bank (IBN)**.

Emerging markets as a haven from developed markets financial follies? It isn’t as strange as it sounds. **B**

THE STRIKING PRICE

The Right Way to Play Regional Banks Right Now

BY STEVEN M. SEARS

Every financial panic shows how little most people understand about what is happening around them in the markets and the economy.

The recent failure of two major regional banks has unleashed thousands of articles, sell-side analyst reports, and investment strategy notes that act as if the issues now before us were easily identifiable.

But the words are challenged by the numbers. The stock and bond markets have exhibited extraordinary volatility because few people, if any, anticipated this latest financial imbroglio.

As we have noted before, opaque and difficult issues tend to generate overconfident analysis. All of this noise—information without economic value—is a reminder that investors should focus on what they can control and ignore what they can't.

Manage investing risk by buying the stocks of well-run companies that pay dividends or are producing innovative products with competitive moats. Let others seduce microphones with suave statements about the passing scene. Instead, say little and try to capitalize on volatility. The options market can help.

Consider the **SPDR S&P Regional Banking** exchange-traded fund (ticker: KRE). The bland name belies the tsunami of trouble the sector has unleashed on the stock market, here and abroad, and the potential it has to create more chaos.

Since the 2008-09 financial crisis, regulators have focused on monitoring and shoring up systemically important banks. But smaller banks, which many people thought were less risky, have proved to be riskier than their Rotary Club veneers.

The Regional Banking ETF has fallen from \$64 in mid-February to a bit under \$44. Yet it is hard to imagine that the U.S. government will let the sector implode and destroy the confidence and savings of so many Americans—even though

Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said that she's not considering raising the federal deposit insurance limit of \$250,000.

This month's torrid events evoke Lehman Brothers' failure. Many of the world's biggest companies, financial and otherwise, were expected to follow suit back then. But it soon became clear that the government couldn't let that occur. The resulting countermeasures contributed to the current crisis, but that isn't our current concern.

The government is no doubt creating plans to stabilize the banking sector. Regulators and policy makers will probably seek broad remedies after an intensive review of individual regional banks.

Rather than guessing which banks might outperform, investors can consider monetizing the entire sector by selling a cash-secured put option on the Regional Banking ETF. This allows investors to profit from elevated fear about the sector's future while positioning to buy the ETF at a below-market price.

With the ETF at \$43.52, the May \$40 put could be sold for about \$2.20. If it is above the strike price at expiration, investors keep the put premium. Should it be below the strike price, investors will own it at an effective price of \$37.80 (strike price minus premium received).

During the past 52 weeks, the ETF has ranged from \$41.90 to \$72.77.

The caveat on such an aggressive trade is that the position should be held, if the shares are bought, for a minimum of three to five years and ideally longer.

The troubles that led to the failure of Silicon Valley Bank and Signature Bank will take time to rectify. More disturbing facts could surface, but the market mob is almost always too fearful and confident, and the options market feeds off that. **B**

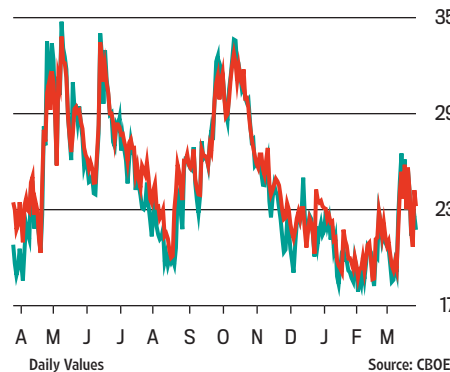
Steven M. Sears is the president and chief operating officer of Options Solutions, a specialized asset-management firm. Neither he nor the firm has a position in the options or underlying securities mentioned in this column.

Manage risk by buying the stocks of well-run companies that pay dividends or are producing innovative products with competitive moats.

Equity Options

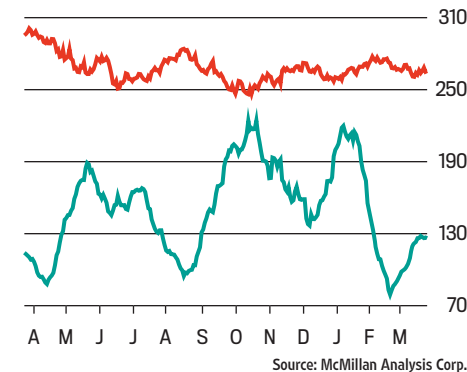
CBOE Volatility Index

● VIX Close ● VIX Futures



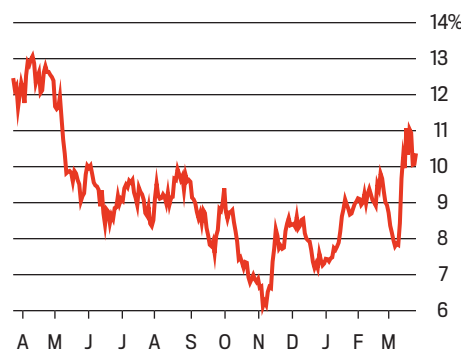
The Equity-Only Put-Call Ratio

● Put-Call Ratio ● S&P 500 Index



SPX Skew

Implied volatility %



NDX Skew

Implied volatility %



Skew indicates whether the options market expects a stock-market advance or decline. It measures the difference between the implied volatility of puts and calls that are 10% out of the money and expire in three months. Higher readings are bearish.

Week's Most Active

Company	Symbol	Tot Vol	Calls	Puts	Avg Tot Vol	IV %ile	Ratio
Amprion Technologies	AMPX	19772	19017	755	572	84	34.6
Silvercorp Metals	SVM	30621	30519	102	896	60	34.2
TORM PLC	TRMD	17845	17587	258	624	0	28.6
Moneygram Int'l	MGI	12205	1922	10283	580	1	21.0
Scynexus	SCYX	5585	5120	465	316	95	17.7
On Holding	ONON	248846	135919	112927	15080	16	16.5
Zoetis	ZTS	43997	41419	2578	3420	64	12.9
Millerknoll	MLKN	4355	2271	2084	408	39	10.7
IamGold	IAG	14743	14631	112	1408	66	10.5
Emagin	EMAN	6369	6287	82	668	11	9.5
Generation Bio	GBIO	2835	2752	83	316	75	9.0
Hilton Worldwide	HLT	59448	57497	1951	6768	81	8.8
Albertson's	ACI	62832	62339	493	7272	4	8.6
U.S. Xpress Enterprises	USX	19708	7864	11844	2380	100	8.3
UBS Group	UBS	178374	85272	93102	22564	97	7.9
Harmonic	HLIT	4058	3798	260	552	42	7.4
New Gold	NGD	16667	16530	137	2452	48	6.8
ProFrac	ACDC	2726	2395	331	424	70	6.4
NY Community Bancorp	NYCB	139291	85497	53794	23820	98	5.8
Brunswick	BC	5852	1475	4377	1024	21	5.7

This table of the most active options this week, as compared to average weekly activity—not just raw volume. The idea is that the unusually heavy trading in these options might be a predictor of corporate activity—takeovers, earnings surprises, earnings pre-announcements, biotech FDA hearings or drug trial result announcements, and so forth. Dividend arbitrage has been eliminated. In short, this list attempts to identify where heavy speculation is taking place. These options are likely to be expensive in comparison to their usual pricing levels. Furthermore, many of these situations may be rumor-driven. Most rumors do not prove to be true, so one should be aware of these increased risks if trading in these names. Ratio is the Tot Vol divided by Avg Tot Vol. IV %ile is how expensive the options are on a scale from 0 to 100. Source: McMillan Analysis

COMMODITIES

Diesel Prices May Reflect Weakness in Economy

BY MYRA P. SAEFONG

Diesel prices at the pump have fallen to their lowest in over a year. That's good news for consumers, but the decline in prices for the fuel suggests a gloomy outlook when it comes to the U.S. economy.

"Diesel fuel is ubiquitous in our economy," says Brian Milne, product manager, editor, and analyst at DTN. It's a "critical component in industrial production and...supply-chain dynamics."

Weaker demand, however, has led to lower diesel prices. U.S. government data show diesel demand in the first 10 weeks of this year down 12.6% from the comparable period in 2022, says Milne, with the steep drop in demand due to slowing growth in parts of the economy, especially for heavy industry and construction. This slowdown is further pressured by higher interest rates and the recent bank failures increasing expectations for a recession, he says.

On March 24, U.S. retail diesel prices averaged \$4.263 a gallon, down from \$5.53 a year ago, according to AAA.

While retail gasoline prices have been occasionally rising, diesel so far this year has declined, and prices could eventually fall below \$4 a gallon in the weeks ahead, says Patrick De Haan, head of petroleum analysis at GasBuddy.

That's a significant shift from last year, when diesel prices climbed to a record because of higher underlying prices for crude, higher natural-gas prices, and tighter refined product supply and demand, says Jason Gabelman, an analyst at TD Cowen.

The fuel reached its highest recorded average of \$5.816 on June 19, 2022, AAA data show. The post Covid-19 lockdown spike in consumer consumption accelerated economic growth in the second half of 2020 and through all of 2021, says DTN's Milne, with the surge in demand outstripping capacity, pushing costs in moving freight on water and land to record highs.

The surge came after a loss in U.S. refining capacity, and Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 "fragmented" the global energy supply chain, he says.


U.S. inflation reached a 40-year high in June 2022, with diesel and gasoline as key components underpinning the surge in prices paid by businesses and consumers, says Milne. Consumers continued to spend, but higher costs for businesses began to "curtail activity" in home building and, later, manufacturing, leading these industries—heavy users of diesel fuel—to contract, easing diesel demand.

Meanwhile, the Federal Reserve began to lift the benchmark federal-funds rate to lower inflation. So, rate-sensitive industries such as housing slowed further, while concern over recession grew—denting consumer confidence, he says.

"Numerous economic indicators" point to a strong likelihood of recession in the second half of 2023 or early 2024, says Milne. Given that U.S. diesel consumption is closely correlated with economic growth, demand would decline further amid a recession, he says.

Still, the diesel market is tighter than before the Russia-Ukraine war, and "most clearly expressed in diesel cracks at \$30" a barrel, which is around two times historical levels, says Gabelman. The crack spread refers to the price difference between crude oil and diesel.

The diesel premium to crude could ease somewhat as new refining capacity comes online, though this may be offset if natural-gas prices move higher, says Gabelman, noting that natural gas may push up the cost for refining crude and can be a substitute for diesel.

For now, U.S. independent refiners provide the highest exposure to diesel cracks, and within that group, Gabelman says TD Cowen is "most positive" on oil-and-gas exploration and production outfit **Par Pacific Holdings** (ticker: PARR) and petroleum refining, marketing, and transportation firm **Marathon Petroleum** (MPC). 



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INSIDE SCOOP

Centene CEO Picks Up Slumping Insurer's Shares

BY CONNOR SMITH

With shares of Centene struggling, the health insurer's chief executive scooped up shares.

Centene stock (ticker: CNC), trading recently at about \$62, is down 27% in the past 12 months, or 24% year to date. Shares have traded from \$61.71 to \$98.53 in the past year.

The St. Louis-based company said last month that fourth-quarter revenue rose 9% year over year to \$35.6 billion. For 2023, Centene forecast sales of \$131.5 billion to \$133.5 billion and adjusted earnings per share of \$6.25 to \$6.40.

CEO Sarah London made her first open-market purchase of Centene shares on March 17. She paid nearly \$1.9 million for 30,000 shares at an average price of \$62.60.

The company didn't return a

request seeking comment or to make London available for comment.

"Our disciplined focus in 2022 allowed us to successfully execute on foundational work that will support our long-term growth strategy," London said in the Feb. 7 earnings release. "We also delivered strong financial results, exceeding our most recent full-year guidance. This positive momentum positions us well for 2023 and beyond as we maximize the opportunities ahead for our core business."

London, a Centene veteran who had been vice chairman of the board, was named CEO in March 2022. The company reached a deal with activist Politan Capital Management in December 2021 to expand the board and appoint five new directors. Longtime CEO Michael Neidorff left the company in February 2022 on medical leave. He died in April. **E**

In the past few years, Centene has seen a board shake-up and a new CEO. With the stock down, CEO Sarah London recently bought shares.

Activist Holdings

Argo Group International (ARGO)

Voce Capital owns 3,317,697 shares of the property and casualty insurer, equal to 9.5% of the outstanding stock. Brookfield Reinsurance (ticker: BNRE) announced on Feb. 8 that it agreed to acquire Argo Group for \$30 per share in cash, approximately \$1.1 billion in total value. Voce Capital entered into a voting and support agreement the same day to vote all of its available Argo Group shares in favor of the deal. On March 17, Voce

Capital filed a Form 144 with the Securities and Exchange Commission covering its entire Argo stake, a regulatory move as the merger progresses. A special meeting for Argo shareholders is scheduled for April 19 to vote on Brookfield's proposal.

Exelixis (EXEL)

Farallon Capital Management disclosed a stake in the oncology-focused biotech firm of 23,466,000 shares, equal to 7.2% of the outstanding stock. Farallon Capital revealed that it had and will continue to have talks with Exelixis to discuss, among other topics, "concerns about [Exelixis'] poor stock price performance." To counter,

These disclosures are from 13Ds filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission. 13Ds are filed within 10 days of an entity's attaining more than 5% in any class of a company's securities. Subsequent changes in holdings or intentions must be reported in amended filings. This material is from March 16 through March 22, 2023. Source: Verity Data (verityplatform.com)

Farallon believes that the biotech needs to "refresh the board, rationalize research-and-development efforts, return capital to stockholders...and improve investor communications." Farallon is also talking to Exelixis' board "about its composition and potential candidates to serve as directors." Farallon has communicated with Caligan Partners about the above matters, and thus the pair are considered to have formed a "group." Caligan filed a separate 13D reflecting 850,000 Exelixis shares, independent of those held by Farallon.

Increases in Holdings

Brightcove (BCOV)

Edenbrook Capital raised its holding in the cloud-based streaming services firm to 6,076,462 shares. Edenbrook bought 378,284 Brightcove shares from \$4.36 to \$5.27 apiece from Feb. 24 through March 17. Edenbrook has been a steady buyer of Brightcove's stock since August 2021, when it disclosed a 10.6% stake. Edenbrook, with its latest investment, now holds 14.4% of Brightcove's tradable stock.

Decreases in Holdings

LivePerson (LPSN)

Starboard Value slashed its interest in the conversational artificial-intelligence technology firm to 2,360,000 shares. Starboard Value sold 4,645,000 LivePerson shares from March 7 to March 17 at per share prices of \$4.20 through \$11.10. Starboard now owns a 3.1% interest in LivePerson, below the 5% threshold that would require disclosure of any further LivePerson stock sales. LivePerson has lost more than half of its value after it reported a rather stark earnings miss and lowered full 2023 guidance on March 15. Roth MKM and Craig Hallum followed with analyst downgrades from Buy to Neutral and/or Hold.

POWER PLAY

As the Crisis Clears, Bank Deals Rise

BY CARLETON ENGLISH

Expect to see more consolidation in the banking industry amid the latest bit of tumult in the sector—just not right away.

Already, we've seen government-led acquisitions of Credit Suisse by UBS (UBS) as well as much of what was Signature Bank by New York Community Bancorp (NYCB) subsidiary Flagstar. Not to mention the continuing effort by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. to sell fallen SVB Financial.

It's not just forced mergers that will lead to more consolidation. Prices were down even before SVB. And the challenging economics and unique risks of running a smaller bank with more concentrated client bases will compel other tie-ups after the dust settles from the recent crisis.

"All these recent developments and stresses happened very quickly, and bank CEOs are heavily focused internally right now. We need to have a week or two of business as usual before CEOs even consider going on the offensive with transactions," Mitch Berlin, vice chair of EY Americas Strategy and Transactions, tells *Barron's*.

But even though banks might not be ready to play offense, they might look to mergers as a form of defense. Small and regional banks may face more regulation in light of recent troubles. That means more costs and squeezed profits. Even though bank mergers face a tough regulatory climate, merging may be the only chance that some banks have to stay competitive.

"It's possible regulators will take a pragmatic view on deals to enable them to close and to protect a bank and their customers," Berlin says.

That may be welcome news for bank investors. **E**

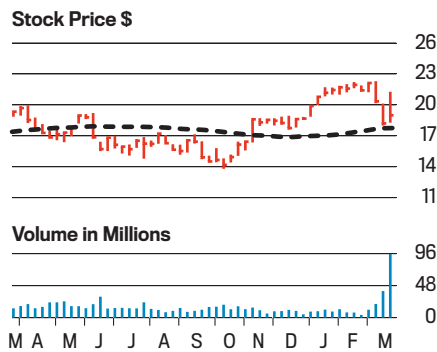
CHARTING THE MARKET

A graphic look at selected stock activity for the week ended March 24, 2023
 Edited by Bill Alpert

UBS Group

UBS (NYSE) • \$18.99 • 0.79

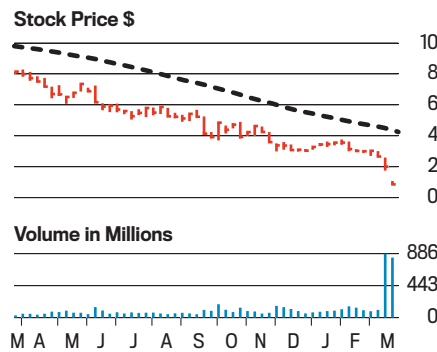
The bank's buyout of troubled Credit Suisse expands UBS's franchise in wealth management and Swiss banking. The deal prompted a Moody's downgrade.



Credit Suisse Group

CS (NYSE) • \$0.86 • -1.15

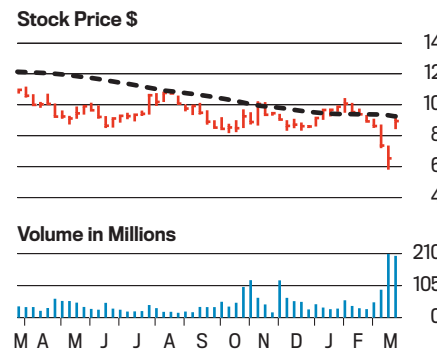
Shareholders will get \$3 billion of UBS stock, but Credit Suisse investors who thought their "contingent convertibles" were bonds will get nothing.



New York Community Bancorp

NYCB (NYSE) • \$8.95 • 2.41

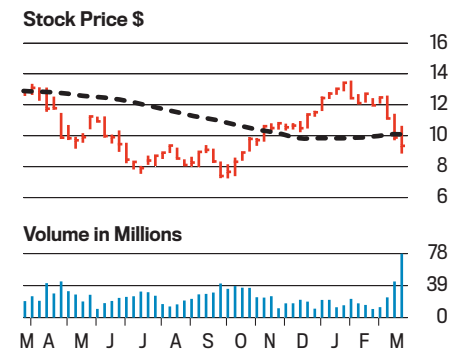
By acquiring Signature Bank's branches, some discounted loans, but not its crypto business, NYCB will boost its earnings, say analysts.



Deutsche Bank

DB (NYSE) • \$9.35 • -0.54

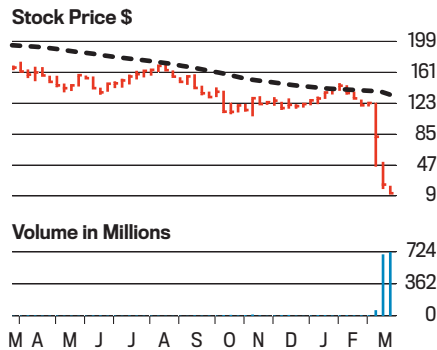
Jitters about Germany's big bank were reflected in prices of its credit default swaps—a kind of bond insurance instrument—that spiked to four-year highs.



First Republic Bank

FRC (NYSE) • \$12.36 • -10.67

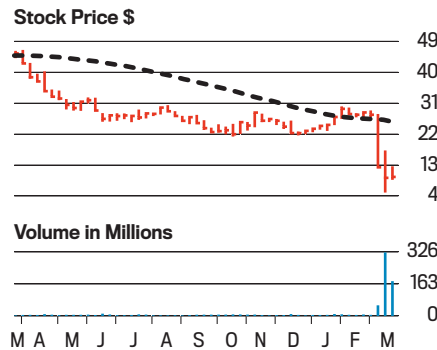
The California bank was reported to have hired bankers to consider its sale, after a Fitch downgrade and a cash injection by bigger banks.



PacWest Bancorp

PACW (NASDAQ) • \$9.55 • 0.27

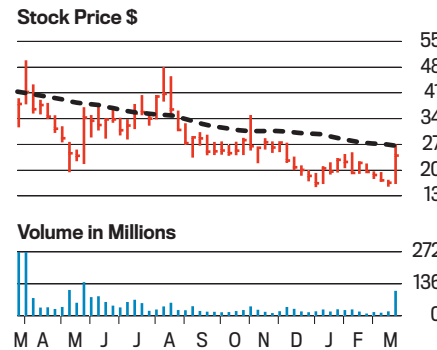
With its shares yoyo-ing, the regional bank decided not to raise money by selling stock. It lined up credit and said it has "solid liquidity."



GameStop

GME (NYSE) • \$23.98 • 7.38

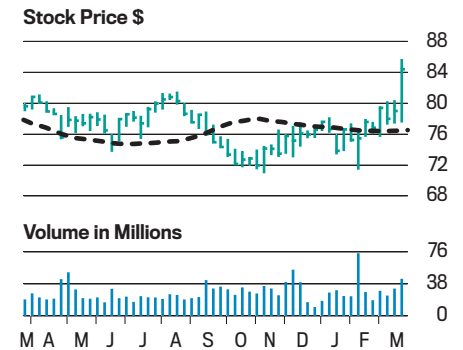
Reporting its first profit since early 2021, the videogame retailer surprised Wall Street with earnings of 16 cents a share in January's quarter.



Activision Blizzard

ATVI (NASDAQ) • \$84.39 • 5.40

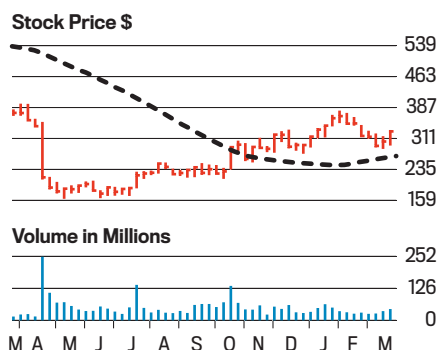
Britain's antitrust regulator said it no longer opposed the Microsoft deal to acquire the publisher of videogames like Call of Duty for \$95 a share.



Netflix

NFLX (NASDAQ) • \$328.39 • 24.89

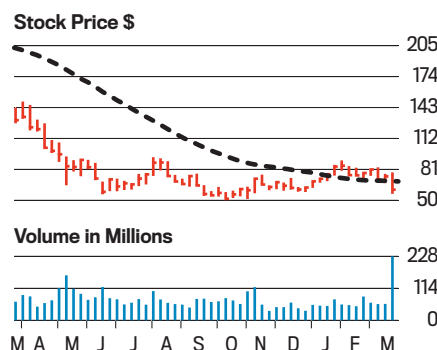
JPMorgan renewed its Buy rating on the video streaming stock, after news that its ad-supported service has already reached a million subscribers.



Block

SQ (NYSE) • \$60.68 • -13.30

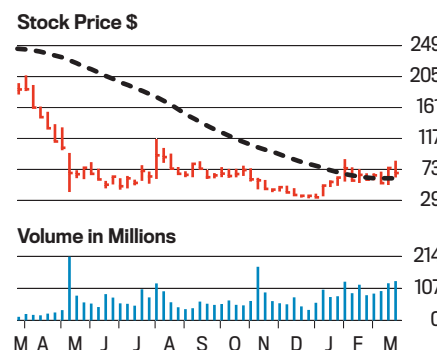
Short sellers at Hindenburg Research alleged the payment service has inflated its user counts, in a report Block called misleading and inaccurate.



Coinbase Global

COIN (NASDAQ) • \$67.83 • -7.15

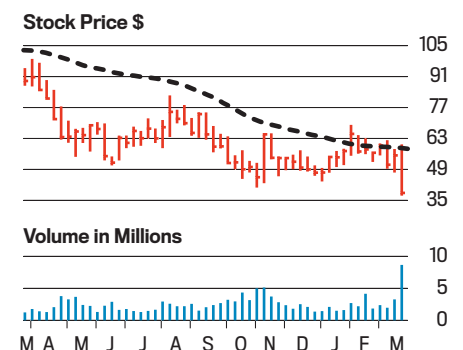
The Securities and Exchange Commission told the crypto broker that it's under investigation. Wall Street analysts fear a dent in Coinbase revenues.



Trupanion

TRUP (NASDAQ) • \$38.35 • -16.99

Three top executives will leave the seller of medical insurance for pets, including its chief financial officer and its head of product pricing.



The charts record the net change in share price, the high, low and closing trades, and share volume for companies with noteworthy stock activity last week. In addition, the graphs depict last week's daily price activity in detail. The dotted line on some graphs denotes the stock's 200-day moving average; lack of a moving average means the shares have traded for less than that time period. If the close from the current week is lower than a year ago the graph will be presented in red. If the close from the current week is higher than a year ago then the graph will be presented in green.

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RESEARCH REPORTS

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How Analysts Size Up Companies

These reports, excerpted and edited by *Barron's*, were issued recently by investment and research firms. The reports are a sampling of analysts' thinking; they should not be considered the views or recommendations of *Barron's*. Some of the reports' issuers have provided, or hope to provide, investment-banking or other services to the companies being analyzed.

New York Community Bancorp NYCB-NYSE

Outperform • Price \$6.54 on March 17
by Wedbush

We're upgrading NYCB from Neutral, owing to material earnings-per-share accretion of 20% from the Signature Bank deal. [On March 19], the FDIC announced that it had entered into a purchase agreement with Flagstar Bank, a subsidiary of NYCB, for a portion of Signature's loan and deposit portfolio. Signature's 40 former branches will operate under the Flagstar brand. NYCB benefits from a sweetheart deal, as the FDIC priced the assets to move quickly. In exchange for the \$2.7 billion discount on acquired loans, plus the interest income earned on the loans and securities, NYCB will give up only \$300 million in equity appreciation rights to the FDIC. The net benefit to shareholders of \$2.4 billion compares to the company's \$4.5 billion market cap on March 17 and represents material upside for the stock. We also note that NYCB is executing on its \$135 million cost savings [target] related to [its 2021 Flagstar acquisition]. Price target: \$11.

KB Home KBH-NYSE

Neutral • Price \$36.80 on March 22
by Credit Suisse

Company guidance implies a near-term bottoming of margins. KBH reported a 21.8% gross margin (preimpairments) in first-quarter 2023, above our estimate of 20.5%. Management expects full-year 2023 gross margins of 20.5% to 21.5%. But orders fell 53%, year over year, driven by declines of 72% in KBH's Central region (primarily Texas and Colorado) and 56% in the Southeast. Orders fell 22% in the West and 37% in the Southwest. KBH's number of owned and controlled lots slid to 62,404 from 68,795 at the end of 2022, with the decline based on home closings and walking away from option deposits. This makes sense, given KBH's land position and slower pace of sales. KBH repurchased \$75 million

of stock during the quarter (up from \$50 million in 2022's fourth quarter). It will probably continue to buy shares, based on yesterday's \$500 million authorization and with the stock trading at an 18% discount to book value. Price target: \$35.

General Mills GIS-NYSE

Neutral • Price \$79.87 on March 22
by Mizuho Securities

[Third-quarter results provided] another solid print from one of the best executors in food. Guidance was surprisingly raised again, following an increase on Feb. 21. Fiscal third-quarter's beat was of strong quality; margins are recovering. The strength of General Mills' execution is underappreciated by the Street, and upside probably exists to out-year expectations. But the shares already reflect material market defensiveness (about a 20% premium versus U.S. food peers, based on estimated 2023 Ebitda [earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortization] versus a five-year average of 5%). This probably limits near-term upside. Price target: \$75.

Alaska Air Group ALK-NYSE

Overweight • Price \$39.40 on March 22
by J.P. Morgan

Despite volatility in the [airline] space, Alaska Air has more than ample liquidity, and we expect it to widen its gap as a margin leader in coming years. Also, being just one of two airlines that resisted diluting owners during the pandemic, Alaska Air emerged from it with little incremental harm. Our December 2023 price target of \$91 is reached by applying a 50% weighting to a 12 times price/earnings ratio to our 2024 EPS estimate and a 50% weighting to eight times our 2024 estimate of enterprise value/earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, amortization, and restructuring or rent costs. For context, we use a higher P/E multiple for **Southwest Airlines** (ticker: LUV, 14 times) and a lower one for **JetBlue**

Insider Transactions

Purchases

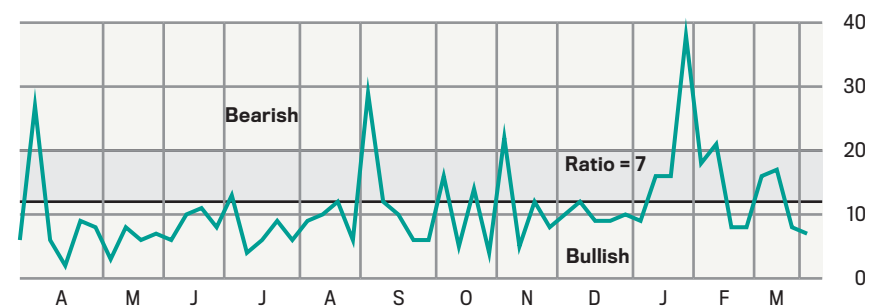
Company	Symbol	Insiders	Shares	\$ Val (000's)
Capri	CPRI	2	244,900	10,177
Charles Schwab	SCHW	5	64,700	3,782
Hippo	HIPO	1	208,531	3,009
Alliance Resource Partners	ARLP	1	148,741	2,750
Wag!	PET	4	1,318,634	2,675
Guardant Health	GH	1	93,052	2,449
B Riley Financial	RILY	4	80,963	2,444
Enovix	ENVX	1	172,156	1,944
Centene	CNC	1	30,000	1,878
Merrimack Pharmaceuticals	MACK	1	160,590	1,850
Liberty Media	LSXMK	1	50,000	1,336
Vera Therapeutics	VERA	1	182,238	1,297
Dun & Bradstreet	DNB	1	116,250	1,249
Gossamer Bio	GOSS	3	947,072	1,071
Tidewater	TDW	1	27,000	1,070
United Airlines	UAL	1	25,000	1,065
Liberty Latin America	LILAK	1	135,314	1,058
Walmart	WMT	1	7,245	1,000
Vitesse Energy	VTS	4	55,000	929
Keurig Dr Pepper	KDP	2	25,468	881

Sales

Company	Symbol	Insiders	Shares	\$ Val (000's)
Springworks Therapeutics	SWTX	2	1,751,106	49,910
Airbnb	ABNB	1	350,000	41,027
Stagwell	STGW	2	4,304,577	27,676
Utz Brands	UTZ	1	1,500,000	24,990
Vertex	VRTX	2	1,385,164	24,590
Cadence Design Systems	CDNS	3	104,344	21,439
CrowdStrike	CRWD	5	94,568	12,663
Inspire Medical Systems	INSP	1	45,000	12,388
Doordash	DASH	1	186,000	11,073
Amylyx Pharmaceuticals	AMLX	5	322,127	10,266
Burlington Stores	BURL	1	47,153	9,877
Seagen	SEGN	3	46,000	9,207
Semrush	SEMR	3	1,055,000	9,070
Alphabet	GOOGL	1	75,000	7,500
Tradeweb Markets	TW	3	91,969	6,897
J.M. Smucker	SJM	3	44,795	6,874
Agilon Health	AGL	4	280,000	6,848
United Therapeutics	UTHR	2	30,000	6,612
Analog Devices	ADI	1	35,001	6,563
Liberty Media	FWONK	1	84,995	6,068

An insider is any officer, director or owner of 10% or more of a class of a company's securities. In most cases, an insider must report any trade to the SEC within two business days. The tables highlight companies that filed with the SEC through last Wednesday. The tables do not include pension-plan or employee stock-option activity, trades by beneficial owners of 10% or more, trades under \$2 per share or trades under 100 shares. The "Purchases" column includes only open-market and private purchases; the "Sales" column includes only open-market and private sales, and excludes trades preceded by option exercise in the 12 months prior to the reported event. Source: Thomson Reuters

Insider Transactions Ratio



Ratio of Insiders Sales to Buys. Readings under 12:1 are Bullish. Those over 20:1 are Bearish. The total top 20 sales and buys are 311,540,175 and 43,912,482 respectively; Source: Thomson Reuters

(JBLU, 10 times), and similar EV/Ebitdar multiples across our universe.

Boyd Group Services BYD-Canada

Outperform • Price C\$208.80 [US\$153]
on March 22
by BMO Research

Boyd is a leading North American collision-repair operator, with 860 locations. It experienced significant headwinds in wage inflation and parts shortages as a result of the pandemic. These challenges will normalize going forward, and we see a significant runway for unit expansion. Yet valuation is toward the lower end of the company's historical range. This presents a good entry point in a stock that we expect to compound [in value] over time. Price target: C\$240 [US\$176].

Chewy CHWY-NYSE

Outperform • Price \$37.76 on March 22
by Oppenheimer

Chewy [which sells pet food and other pet products online] reported another solid all-around quarter. Fourth-quarter adjusted Ebitda of \$92 million easily topped a Street estimate of \$25.2 million, driven by a stronger top line and a gross margin well above expectations. However, management introduced mixed, albeit potentially conservative, fiscal-2023 guidance that incorporates strong top-line growth, but adjusted Ebitda margins down [by as much as 0.5%], driven by investment headwinds, including plans to grow internationally, with expectations of entering a new market over the next few quarters. Our 12-18 month price target: \$50.

DATA

Statistics from March 20-24, 2023

Table listing various market indices and their values, including Barron's 50-Stock Average, Cash Track, Charting the Market, etc.

Table listing mutual funds and their values, including N.Y. Stock Exchange, Nasdaq National Market, New Corporate Listings, etc.

Table listing stock market statistics, including Week In Stocks, Weekly Bond Statistics, Winners & Losers Stocks, etc.

Contact Us
For queries, email us at memberservices@djw.com

NEW YORK STOCK EXCHANGE COMPOSITE LIST - NEW HIGHS - NEW LOWS

Main table listing New York Stock Exchange Composite List with columns for High, Low, Name, Tick, Yld, P/E, Last, Chg, Div, Amt.

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Five-Day Dow Composite

How About That?: The Dow Jones Industrial Average gained 1.2% last week, as the bank panic seemed to calm down and the Fed raised interest rates. Amgen rose 3.6%, while Home Depot fell 1.9%.

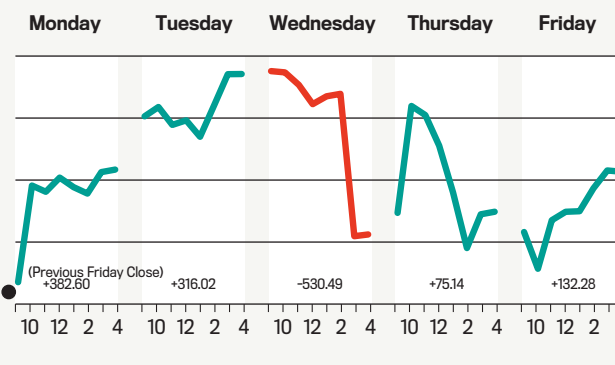


Table listing various stocks and their values, including BARK, BGS, BCE, BERK, BKH, BSAQ, etc.

DATA

NEW YORK STOCK EXCHANGE COMPOSITE LIST

BARRONS.COM/DATA

Table with columns: -52-Week-High, Name, Ticker, Div, Div Amt, Last, P/E, Yld, P/E, Last, Chg, Div Amt. Includes entries like CapitalOne, Capri, CardinalHealth, etc.

Table with columns: -52-Week-High, Name, Ticker, Div, Div Amt, Last, P/E, Yld, P/E, Last, Chg, Div Amt. Includes entries like Cooper, Cooper-Standard, Copa, etc.

Table with columns: -52-Week-High, Name, Ticker, Div, Div Amt, Last, P/E, Yld, P/E, Last, Chg, Div Amt. Includes entries like eilBeauty, EMCOR, EOG Resources, etc.

Table with columns: -52-Week-High, Name, Ticker, Div, Div Amt, Last, P/E, Yld, P/E, Last, Chg, Div Amt. Includes entries like FairSaco, Fairchild, FarmlandPartners, etc.

Table with columns: -52-Week-High, Name, Ticker, Div, Div Amt, Last, P/E, Yld, P/E, Last, Chg, Div Amt. Includes entries like GlobalLife, GlobusBio, Godebny, etc.

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NEW YORK STOCK EXCHANGE COMPOSITE LIST

BARRONS.COM/DATA

Table with columns: -52-Week High/Low, Name, Ticker, Sym, Yld, P/E, Last, Chg., Div Amt. Includes HyattHotels, Hylon, HyattHote, etc.

Table with columns: -52-Week High/Low, Name, Ticker, Sym, Yld, P/E, Last, Chg., Div Amt. Includes ICICI Bank, ICL Group, IDACORP, etc.

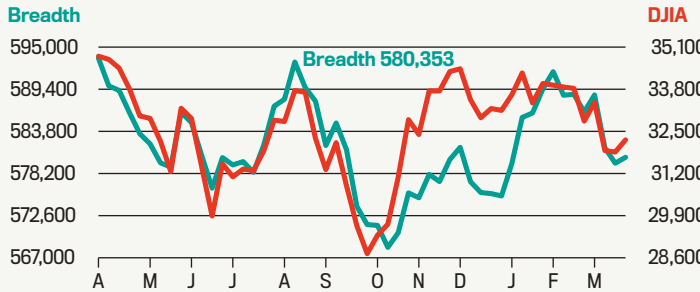
Table with columns: -52-Week High/Low, Name, Ticker, Sym, Yld, P/E, Last, Chg., Div Amt. Includes InspireMedical, InspireMed, IntellInc, etc.

Table with columns: -52-Week High/Low, Name, Ticker, Sym, Yld, P/E, Last, Chg., Div Amt. Includes JBG SMITH Prop, JELD-WEN, JLL, etc.

Table with columns: -52-Week High/Low, Name, Ticker, Sym, Yld, P/E, Last, Chg., Div Amt. Includes KAR Auction, KB Financial, KBH, etc.

NYSE Cumulative Daily Breadth vs DJIA

Scraping By: NYSE Composite breadth rose for the first time in three weeks, as the S&P 500 rose 1.4% amid signs the Fed might be near the end of its rate hikes. Winning NYSE stocks narrowly outpaced losers.



In generating this chart, we subtract each day's NYSE composite declines from that day's advances. The resultant total is added to the next day's total, and so on. When all five days' numbers are added together, this produces the weekly figure we plot. Dec. 31, 1985 = 1000.

Table with columns: -52-Week High/Low, Name, Ticker, Sym, Yld, P/E, Last, Chg., Div Amt. Includes KinsaleCapital, Kirby, KiteRealty, etc.

Table with columns: -52-Week High/Low, Name, Ticker, Sym, Yld, P/E, Last, Chg., Div Amt. Includes LCI Inds, LG Display, LendingClub, etc.

Table with columns: -52-Week High/Low, Name, Ticker, Sym, Yld, P/E, Last, Chg., Div Amt. Includes LincolnNational, Linde, Lindsay, etc.

Table with columns: -52-Week High/Low, Name, Ticker, Sym, Yld, P/E, Last, Chg., Div Amt. Includes MisterCarWash, MistrasGroup, MitsubishiUFJ, etc.

Table with columns: -52-Week High/Low, Name, Ticker, Sym, Yld, P/E, Last, Chg., Div Amt. Includes NACCO Inds, N-able, NCR, etc.

Table with columns: -52-Week High/Low, Name, Ticker, Sym, Yld, P/E, Last, Chg., Div Amt. Includes OFGBancorp, OGE Energy, OGI Glass, etc.

Table with columns: -52-Week High/Low, Name, Ticker, Sym, Yld, P/E, Last, Chg., Div Amt. Includes OccidentalPetrol, OceanEnergy, OwenFinancial, etc.

Table with columns: -52-Week High/Low, Name, Ticker, Sym, Yld, P/E, Last, Chg., Div Amt. Includes PPG Ind, PPG Ind, PPG Ind, etc.

Table with columns: -52-Week High/Low, Name, Ticker, Sym, Yld, P/E, Last, Chg., Div Amt. Includes PaycomSoftware, Paymentus, PaySafe, etc.

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NEW YORK STOCK EXCHANGE COMPOSITE LIST

BARRONS.COM/DATA

Table with columns: -52-Week, High, Low, Name, Ticker, Yld, P/E, Last, Chg, Div. Includes entries like 10.15 9.65 PostHldgsA, 18.03 14.13 PostalsRealty, etc.

Table with columns: R, High, Low, Name, Ticker, Yld, P/E, Last, Chg, Div. Includes entries like 264.94 152.90 RBC Bearings, 10.60 9.90 RCF AcqN, etc.

Table with columns: S, High, Low, Name, Ticker, Yld, P/E, Last, Chg, Div. Includes entries like 125.28 78.22 SAP, 423.55 279.32 S&P Global, etc.

Table with columns: -52-Week, High, Low, Name, Ticker, Yld, P/E, Last, Chg, Div. Includes entries like 83.96 19.06 SLGreenRealty, 54.97 24.66 SM Energy, etc.

Table with columns: -52-Week, High, Low, Name, Ticker, Yld, P/E, Last, Chg, Div. Includes entries like 176.47 136.54 Semptra, 15.00 7.16 Semrush, etc.

Table with columns: -52-Week, High, Low, Name, Ticker, Yld, P/E, Last, Chg, Div. Includes entries like 73.40 43.04 SkylineChm, 6.59 2.03 SmartRent, etc.

Table with columns: -52-Week, High, Low, Name, Ticker, Yld, P/E, Last, Chg, Div. Includes entries like 12.43 6.20 Steelcase, 18.86 11.37 Stellantis, etc.

Table with columns: -52-Week, High, Low, Name, Ticker, Yld, P/E, Last, Chg, Div. Includes entries like 10.45 2.61 TAL Education, 59.38 36.79 TDCX, etc.

Table with columns: -52-Week, High, Low, Name, Ticker, Yld, P/E, Last, Chg, Div. Includes entries like 77.50 21.60 TeladocHealth, 12.12 6.21 TelcelArgentina, etc.

Table with columns: -52-Week, High, Low, Name, Ticker, Yld, P/E, Last, Chg, Div. Includes entries like 10.25 9.73 TrajectoryAlpha, 196.22 120.64 TransTech, etc.

Table with columns: -52-Week, High, Low, Name, Ticker, Yld, P/E, Last, Chg, Div. Includes entries like 22.30 13.80 UBS Group, 60.01 37.18 UDR, etc.

Table with columns: -52-Week, High, Low, Name, Ticker, Yld, P/E, Last, Chg, Div. Includes entries like 60.09 20.03 VF, 8.56 1.25 ViaOptics, etc.

Table with columns: -52-Week, High, Low, Name, Ticker, Yld, P/E, Last, Chg, Div. Includes entries like 5.12 2.16 VicariousSurgeal, 56.23 26.14 Victoria'sSecret, etc.

Table with columns: -52-Week, High, Low, Name, Ticker, Yld, P/E, Last, Chg, Div. Includes entries like 4.20 1.62 XFinancial, 47.31 24.75 XPO, etc.

Table with columns: -52-Week, High, Low, Name, Ticker, Yld, P/E, Last, Chg, Div. Includes entries like 4.20 1.62 XFinancial, 47.31 24.75 XPO, etc.

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DATA

NASDAQ ISSUES - NEW HIGHS - NEW LOWS

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Five-Day Nasdaq Composite

Watching the Watchmen: Netflix's ad-supported offering is proving popular. The SEC is investigating crypto broker Coinbase. The Nasdaq Composite Index finished Friday at 11,824-up 1.7% for the week.

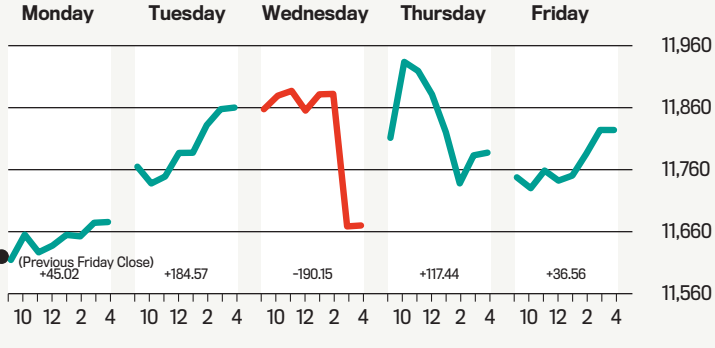


Table of 52-Week Low and High data for various NASDAQ issues, including columns for High, Low, Name, Ticker, Volume, Yield, P/E, Last, Change, and Dividend.

Table of 52-Week Low and High data for various NASDAQ issues, including columns for High, Low, Name, Ticker, Volume, Yield, P/E, Last, Change, and Dividend.

Table of 52-Week Low and High data for various NASDAQ issues, including columns for High, Low, Name, Ticker, Volume, Yield, P/E, Last, Change, and Dividend.

Table of 52-Week Low and High data for various NASDAQ issues, including columns for High, Low, Name, Ticker, Volume, Yield, P/E, Last, Change, and Dividend.

Table of 52-Week Low and High data for various NASDAQ issues, including columns for High, Low, Name, Ticker, Volume, Yield, P/E, Last, Change, and Dividend.

Table of 52-Week Low and High data for various NASDAQ issues, including columns for High, Low, Name, Ticker, Volume, Yield, P/E, Last, Change, and Dividend.

Table of 52-Week Low and High data for various NASDAQ issues, including columns for High, Low, Name, Ticker, Volume, Yield, P/E, Last, Change, and Dividend.

Nasdaq Issues includes stocks traded on the Nasdaq Global Select and Nasdaq Global Market tiers. They are eligible for inclusion on the basis of SEC-approved market value of publicly-held shares, trading volume, price and number of market-makers.

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DATA

NASDAQ ISSUES

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Main table containing NASDAQ stock data with columns for 52-Week High/Low, Name, Ticker, Yld, P/E, Last, Chg, Div, and Div Amt. Includes sub-sections for D, F, H, and L.

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DATA NASDAQ ISSUES

BARRONS.COM/DATA

Table with columns: 52-Week High, Low, Name, Ticker, Yld, P/E, Last, Chg., Div. Includes entries for LexiconPharm, Lintech, LiantBio, etc.

Table with columns: 52-Week High, Low, Name, Ticker, Yld, P/E, Last, Chg., Div. Includes entries for MacomTech, MeliKaszek, MG Energy, etc.

Table with columns: 52-Week High, Low, Name, Ticker, Yld, P/E, Last, Chg., Div. Includes entries for MicroStrategy, Microcast, MicroVision, etc.

Table with columns: 52-Week High, Low, Name, Ticker, Yld, P/E, Last, Chg., Div. Includes entries for Napco Security, NBT Bancorp, NCM, etc.

Table with columns: 52-Week High, Low, Name, Ticker, Yld, P/E, Last, Chg., Div. Includes entries for Novonix, NucAna, NucXera, etc.

Table with columns: 52-Week High, Low, Name, Ticker, Yld, P/E, Last, Chg., Div. Includes entries for PAM Transport, P&G, P&G, etc.

Table with columns: 52-Week High, Low, Name, Ticker, Yld, P/E, Last, Chg., Div. Includes entries for PetIQ, PetMedExpress, Pharming, etc.

Table with columns: 52-Week High, Low, Name, Ticker, Yld, P/E, Last, Chg., Div. Includes entries for RBB Bancorp, RCI Hospitality, RCM, etc.

Table with columns: 52-Week High, Low, Name, Ticker, Yld, P/E, Last, Chg., Div. Includes entries for RegenPharm, RelayTherapy, Remdama, etc.

Table with columns: 52-Week High, Low, Name, Ticker, Yld, P/E, Last, Chg., Div. Includes entries for SBA Bancorp, S&B Com, S&B Tech, etc.

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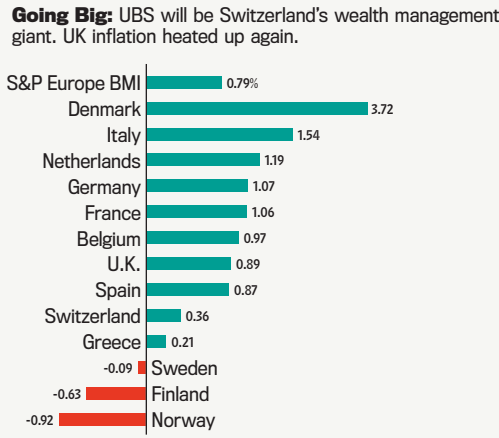
NASDAQ ISSUES

Table of NASDAQ issues with columns for High, Low, Name, Ticker, Yld, P/E, Last, Chg., Div. Includes sub-sections for 52-Week, 52-Week, and T.

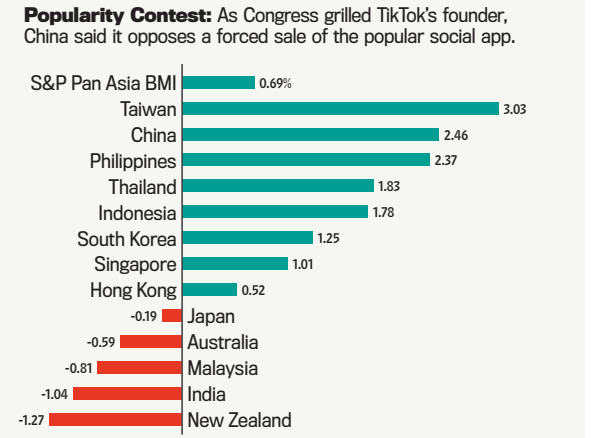
FOREIGN MARKETS

Table of foreign market indices and stock prices with columns for High, Low, Name, Ticker, Yld, P/E, Last, Chg., Div. Includes sub-sections for W, W, and YX YZ.

Europe



Asia



Key Foreign Stock Market Indexes

Table of key foreign stock market indexes with columns for Index Name, Most Recent Close, Week's % Chg., Year-to-Date Chg., and % Chg. Includes indexes like Amsterdam AEX, Athens General, Bangkok SET, etc.

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DATA

TOP 500 EXCHANGE-TRADED PORTFOLIOS

BARRONS.COM/DATA

NOTICE TO READERS: Listed are the top 500 ETFs based on weekly volume.

Table with columns: Name, Tck Sym, Yld, Last, Chg, Div Amt. Lists various ETFs including ARKGenomicRev, BIKRkShMatuityBd, DimenIntlCore2, etc.

NASDAQ section listing ETFs like AXSL1.25XNVDABrDly, AXSSHNOVDB, AXSTSLABrDly, etc.

Table with columns: Name, Tck Sym, Yld, Last, Chg, Div Amt. Lists various ETFs including iSHESGUSD CorpBd, iShFallAngelsUSDB, iSh5-10YIGCorpBd, etc.

NYSE ARCA section listing ETFs like AGF USMkNeut, ARK Innovation, ARK NextGen, etc.

Table with columns: Name, Tck Sym, Yld, Last, Chg, Div Amt. Lists various ETFs including DirexS&PIbiotechBr3, DirexS&PIbiotechB13, DirexS&P500Br1, etc.

Table with columns: Name, Tck Sym, Yld, Last, Chg, Div Amt. Lists various ETFs including DirexS&P500Br2, DirexS&P500Br3, DirexS&P500Br4, etc.

Table with columns: Name, Tck Sym, Yld, Last, Chg, Div Amt. Lists various ETFs including InvscDynOil&GasV, InvscEmvSovtDebt, InvscFinlPrf, etc.

Table with columns: Name, Tck Sym, Yld, Last, Chg, Div Amt. Lists various ETFs including InvscFinlPrf, InvscFinlPrf, InvscFinlPrf, etc.

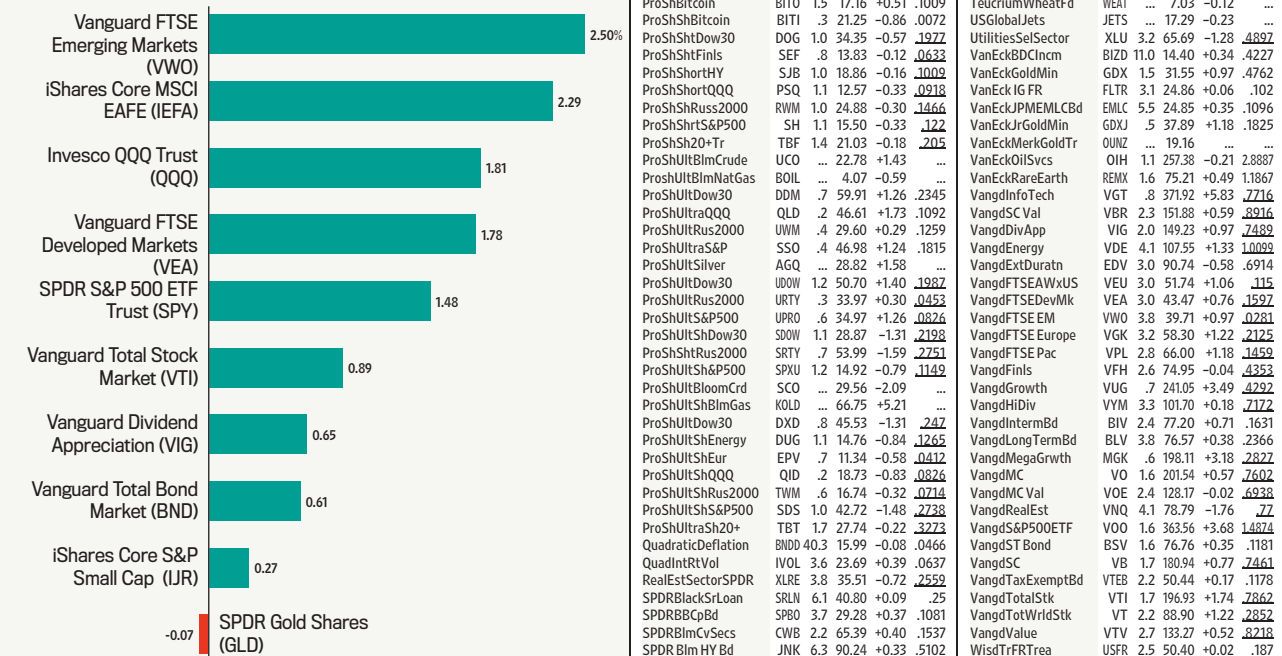
Table with columns: Name, Tck Sym, Yld, Last, Chg, Div Amt. Lists various ETFs including iShMSCIntlQual, iShMSCIntlValue, iShMSCItaly, etc.

Table with columns: Name, Tck Sym, Yld, Last, Chg, Div Amt. Lists various ETFs including iShMSCJapan, iShMSCMexico, iShMSCPacJpn, etc.

Table with columns: Name, Tck Sym, Yld, Last, Chg, Div Amt. Lists various ETFs including SPDR3-12MT-Bill, SPDRDoubleTRAct, SPDRDJIA Tr, etc.

Table with columns: Name, Tck Sym, Yld, Last, Chg, Div Amt. Lists various ETFs including SPDRDJREIT, SPDREuroStx50, SPDRGoldMini, etc.

Selected ETF Leaders



Source: Barron's Statistics

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DATA MUTUAL FUNDS

DATA PROVIDED BY LIPPER

BARRONS.COM/DATA

Table with 5 columns: Fund Name, Net Chg, YTD, 3-Yr, %Ret.

Table with 5 columns: Fund Name, Net Chg, YTD, 3-Yr, %Ret.

Table with 5 columns: Fund Name, Net Chg, YTD, 3-Yr, %Ret.

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Table with 5 columns: Fund Name, Net Chg, YTD, 3-Yr, %Ret.

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Table with 5 columns: Fund Name, Net Chg, YTD, 3-Yr, %Ret.

Table with 5 columns: Fund Name, Net Chg, YTD, 3-Yr, %Ret.

Table with 5 columns: Fund Name, Net Chg, YTD, 3-Yr, %Ret.

Table with 5 columns: Fund Name, Net Chg, YTD, 3-Yr, %Ret.

Table with 5 columns: Fund Name, Net Chg, YTD, 3-Yr, %Ret.

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DATA

MARKET LABORATORY

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Week's New Highs and Lows

NYSE

83 New Highs

401 New Lows

Nasdaq

186 New Highs

730 New Lows

NYSE American

15 New Highs

51 New Lows

Only includes COMMON and REIT stocks

NYSE American

NEW HIGHS

- AltisourceAsset
AultDisruptive
BerenonAcqnl
Chase
ChicagoRivet
eMagin
GalataAcqN
GencorIndcs
GrupoSimec
HNR AcqN
inTEST
PerspectiveTherap

NEW LOWS

- AirIndustries
AirsparNetworks
ArenaGroup
Ashford
BM Tech
Barnwell
BattalionOil
BetterChoice
BlueRidgeBkshs
CKX Lands
ChinaPharma
Cohen
Cryo-Cell
DunxinFinl
1847Holdings
EmersonRadio
FG
FranklinStProp
GEE Group
Globalstar
GoldenMinerals
ITTechPkg
KulrTech
MaiaBiotech
NetworkITechs
NewConceptEner
Nuburu
Oragenics
PolymetMining
PowerREIT
RaMedicalSys
Senseonics
StrawberryFldREIT
Tellurian
TompkinsFin
Escalade
EuratesBiomed
EgoTech
FifthWallIII A
FortuneRiseA
FourLeafAcqN
GenesisUnicorn
7GC A

- 89bio
ActivisionBliz
AehrTestSys
AetheriumAcqNA
AgroFresh
AhrenAcqNA
AldeyraTherap
AllegroMicro
AlphaHlthIII A
AltralndIMotion
Aravive
Ardelyx
AriszAcqNA
ArogoCapA
AryaSciencesV
AtlCoastal II A
AuraFatProjectsA
AccelisTechs
B.RileyPrin250A
Rambus
RedwoodsAcqN
RegenPharm
RemitlyGlobal
ReneoPharm
RF AcqN A
RMGACqNIII A
RothCHAqNv
Sanfilippo
SchultzeSpecI A
SkillfulCrafts
SuperMicroComp
TargetGbl I A
TexasRoadhouse
TravelCenters
TyraBiosciences
UFP Tech
Vertex
ViemedHealthcare
ViscogliosIBros
VisionSensingA
VitaCoco
VOXX Intl
Winmark
YottaAcqN
ZuraBio
NEW LOWS
1stdibs.com
22ndCentury
5EAdvMatls
908Devices
9F
Absci
AcelRxPharm
Aceragen
Actelisntwks
AdamasOne
Adamis
AdicetBio
Adixtt
ADS-TEC

- GrAeroportuario
GreencyAcqN
HealthcareAI A
HealthStream
HomePlateAcqN
HorizonSpacel
Immersion
InsightEnt
Insulet
Intapp
IntegralAcqN1
InterParfums
JupiterWellnessA
KairousAcqN
Kernel
KernelA
KhoslaVentures
KhoslaVenturesIII
LatticeSemi
LFCapAcqNII A
LibertyRscsA
Limbach
LIVCapAcqNII A
Mangoceuticals
MaxproCapA
MinorityEqualityA
Mondelez
MontereyBioAcqN
NapcoSecurity
NearIntelligence
Neovasc
NEXTTracker
NorthViewAcqN
NubiaBrandA
OCA AcqN A
Ohmyhome
OnyxAcqNII A
PDF Solutions
PepGen
PerionNetwork
Perma-Fix
Pharming
PhoenixBiotech
PreformedLine
ProgressSoftware
ProQR Therap
Qomolangma
QuadroAcqNOneA
Rambus
RedwoodsAcqN
RegenPharm
RemitlyGlobal
ReneoPharm
RF AcqN A
RMGACqNIII A
RothCHAqNv
Sanfilippo
SchultzeSpecI A
SkillfulCrafts
SuperMicroComp
TargetGbl I A
TexasRoadhouse
TravelCenters
TyraBiosciences
UFP Tech
Vertex
ViemedHealthcare
ViscogliosIBros
VisionSensingA
VitaCoco
VOXX Intl
Winmark
YottaAcqN
ZuraBio
NEW LOWS
1stdibs.com
22ndCentury
5EAdvMatls
908Devices
9F
Absci
AcelRxPharm
Aceragen
Actelisntwks
AdamasOne
Adamis
AdicetBio
Adixtt
ADS-TEC

- Adtran
AdvEmissions
AdventTech
AegleaBioTherap
AerwinsTech
AEye
Affimed
AGBA
AgileThought
Agriforce
Agrify
AirTransportSvcs
AkariTherap
Alector
AlimeraSciences
AlkalineWater
AllarityTherap
AllogeneTherap
AlphaTauMed
AlphaTeknova
Alpine4
AlpineSummit
Alset
AlterityTherap
AltisourcePortf
Altongred
AlixOncology
AlzamendNeuro
Amedisys
AmerantBncpA
AmericanPubEdu
AmerSoftware
AngionBiomed
Anterix
Apexigen
Appreciate
ApreaTherap
Aptinyx
AquaBountyTech
ArcadiaBiosci
Arcimoto
ArcutisBiotherap
ComeraLifeSci
CommerceBcshrs
Conduent
Conformis
ConslcdComm
ContextTherap
ContraFect
CreativeMedia
Crexendo
CrineticsPharm
Cronos
CumberlandPharm
CumulusMedia
CVB Fin
CXAPP
Cyanotech
CycloTherap
Cytokinetics
CyxteraTech
B RileyFin
BankofMarinBncp
BankOZK
BankwellFin
BaoshengMedia
BayFirstFinancial
BCB Bancorp
DixieGroup
DLH Holdings
Dominari
DoubleDown
DuluthHoldings
DZS
E-HomeHousehold
EagleBancorp
Eargo
EBET
Edgio
EdibleGarden
EditasMedicine
EffectorTherap
EigerBioPharma
ElectraVehicles
BlinkCharging
BogotaFinl
BridgelineDigital
BridgewaterBcsBs
Brightcove
BrightMindsBio

- BrilliantEarthA
BrooklineBcp
BullfrogAI
BurgerFintl
BusFirstBcsBs
C4 Therap
CadrenalTherap
Caesarstone
CandelTherap
CanopyGrowth
CaraTherap
CaratPharm
CareMax
CaribouBio
CarismaTherap
CasaSystems
CatalystBiosci
CathayGenBncp
CBAK Energy
CBLInternational
FirstInternetBncp
FirstLongIsland
FirstMerchants
FirstUS BcsBs
FirstWesternFin
FiveStarBncp
FlexShopper
FlushingFin
FNCB Bancorp
FocusUniversal
FormulaSys
ForwardIndustries
Fossil
FourLeafAcqN
FreightTech
FrequencyTherap
FreshTracks
FulcrumTherap
FultonFin
FusionFuelGreen
FutureFinTech
GITherapeutics
GauchoPharm
GeniusBrands
Genprex
Gevo
GH Research
GladstoneLand
GlobusMaritime
GolarLNG
GraybugVision
GreatLakesDredge
GreenbrookTMS
GreenlandTech
GrindrodShipping
Groupon
GSI Tech
GuardantHealth
GuardianHlth
HackettGroup
HalozymeTherap
HancockWhitney
HanmiFinancial
HanoverBancorp
HarborCustom
HawaiianHoldings
Hempacco
HennessyAdvsr
HeritageFin
Marqeta
MarsAcqN
Materialise
MaxproCapA
mCloudTech
Medigus
E-HomeHousehold
MercerIntl
HopeBancorp
HorizonBancorp
HostHotels
HothTherap
HuadIntl
HyzonMotors
I-Mab
icad
iF Bancorp
iHeartMedia
iMediaBrands
iEnergous
ENGlobal
EQRx

- EquityBcsBs
Erasca
ErayakPwr
ESSA Bancorp
EvaxionBiotech
EveloBiosci
Evogene
Exagen
ExelaTech
FarmerBros
FARO Tech
FinInstitutions
FirstBancorp
FirstBancshares
FirstBank
FirstBusey
FirstCommBkshs
FirstFinIN
FirstFoundation
FirstInterBanc
FirstInternetBncp
FirstLongIsland
FirstMerchants
FirstUS BcsBs
FirstWesternFin
FiveStarBncp
FlexShopper
FlushingFin
FNCB Bancorp
FocusUniversal
FormulaSys
ForwardIndustries
Fossil
FourLeafAcqN
FreightTech
FrequencyTherap
FreshTracks
FulcrumTherap
FultonFin
FusionFuelGreen
FutureFinTech
GITherapeutics
GauchoPharm
GeniusBrands
Genprex
Gevo
GH Research
GladstoneLand
GlobusMaritime
GolarLNG
GraybugVision
GreatLakesDredge
GreenbrookTMS
GreenlandTech
GrindrodShipping
Groupon
GSI Tech
GuardantHealth
GuardianHlth
HackettGroup
HalozymeTherap
HancockWhitney
HanmiFinancial
HanoverBancorp
HarborCustom
HawaiianHoldings
Hempacco
HennessyAdvsr
HeritageFin
Marqeta
MarsAcqN
Materialise
MaxproCapA
mCloudTech
Medigus
E-HomeHousehold
MercerIntl
HopeBancorp
HorizonBancorp
HostHotels
HothTherap
HuadIntl
HyzonMotors
I-Mab
icad
iF Bancorp
iHeartMedia
iMediaBrands
iEnergous
ENGlobal
EQRx

- IndepBankMI
IndependentBank
IndependentBank
IndLogistics
Infobird
Inogen
InovioPharm
Inpixon
Inseego
Insmed
Inspirato
Inter
Intrusion
Investar
FirstBank
FirstBusey
FirstCommBkshs
FirstFinIN
FirstFoundation
FirstInterBanc
FirstInternetBncp
FirstLongIsland
FirstMerchants
FirstUS BcsBs
FirstWesternFin
FiveStarBncp
FlexShopper
FlushingFin
FNCB Bancorp
FocusUniversal
FormulaSys
ForwardIndustries
Fossil
FourLeafAcqN
FreightTech
FrequencyTherap
FreshTracks
FulcrumTherap
FultonFin
FusionFuelGreen
FutureFinTech
GITherapeutics
GauchoPharm
GeniusBrands
Genprex
Gevo
GH Research
GladstoneLand
GlobusMaritime
GolarLNG
GraybugVision
GreatLakesDredge
GreenbrookTMS
GreenlandTech
GrindrodShipping
Groupon
GSI Tech
GuardantHealth
GuardianHlth
HackettGroup
HalozymeTherap
HancockWhitney
HanmiFinancial
HanoverBancorp
HarborCustom
HawaiianHoldings
Hempacco
HennessyAdvsr
HeritageFin
Marqeta
MarsAcqN
Materialise
MaxproCapA
mCloudTech
Medigus
E-HomeHousehold
MercerIntl
HopeBancorp
HorizonBancorp
HostHotels
HothTherap
HuadIntl
HyzonMotors
I-Mab
icad
iF Bancorp
iHeartMedia
iMediaBrands
iEnergous
ENGlobal
EQRx

- Morningstar
MotorcarParts
Movella
MSD AcqN Wt
MSP Recovery
MullenAuto
MultiMetaVerse
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Rallybio
ReconTech
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RedHillBio
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REE Automotive
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ReWalkRobotics
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RVL Pharm
SAB Biotherap
SabraHealthcare
Sabre
Safe&Green
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SalemMedia
SandySpringBncp
SangamoTherap
SangomaTechs
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Satellogic
SaveFoods
SB Financial
ScrippsEW
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SeaChange
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Seer
SelinaHosp
SellasLifeSci
SenesTech
SensusHealthcare
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SHF
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Trevana
TrinityBiotech
TritiumDCFC
Trupanion
Trustmark
TTEC
TuanChe
Udemy
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Uniti
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US Energy
Vacasa
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Veradigm
VerbTech
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Veru
ViaRenewables
Vincoventures
VintageWineEstates
VirginOrbit
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WahFuEducation
WashingtonFederal
WaveDancer
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WholeEarthBrds
WISA Tech
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WSFS Financial
XcelBrands
Xometry
XortxTherap
Y-mAbsTherap
Yellow
Yoshitsu
YSBiopharma
ZeroFox
Zumiez
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Embraer
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InsightAcqNA
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KensingtonCapAcqNv
MagnumOpusA
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NVR
NovoNordisk
OakStreetHealth
OnHolding
OsiskoGold
Penumbra
PostHdgsA
PyrophyteAcqN
QuantumFin
SAP
ShoulderUpTechA
Squarespace
STMicroelec
TakedaPharm
TaylorMorrison
Teekay
ThomsonReuters
TristarAcqNl
twoA
US Xpress
WorthingtonInds
YumChina
NEW LOWS
ADC Therap
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AMTD Digital
AMTD IDEA
ASGN
AdvanceAuto
AdvDrainageSys
AlaskaAir
Albertsons
Alexander's
AlexandriaREIT
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AIG
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Hershey
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InfiniteAcqNA
InsightAcqNA
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MagnumOpusA
MotiveCapII A
NVR
NovoNordisk
OakStreetHealth
OnHolding
OsiskoGold
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PostHdgsA
PyrophyteAcqN
QuantumFin
SAP
ShoulderUpTechA
Squarespace
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- FirstMajestic
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FiscalNote
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FlotekIndustries
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Heliogen
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HershaHospitality
HighwoodsProp
HoraceMannEdu
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HudsonPacProp
ICL Group
IndepRealty
InnovativeIndProp
IntrepidPotash
Invitae
JBG SMITH Prop
J&J
ThomsonReuters
TristarAcqNl
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AlexandriaREIT
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DAILY CBOE VIX INDEX

Table with 6 columns: Week Ended, Open, High, Low, Last, Chg. Row 1: Mar. 24, 22.11, 25.21, 21.60, 21.74, -0.87. Row 2: 23, 21.54, 24.91, 20.16, 22.61, +0.35. Row 3: 22, 21.80, 22.38, 19.94, 22.26, +0.88. Row 4: 21, 24.16, 24.16, 21.29, 21.38, -2.77. Row 5: 20, 27.77, 28.91, 24.00, 24.15, -1.36. Row 6: 17, 22.92, 26.14, 22.58, 25.51, +2.52. Row 7: 16, 26.19, 27.49, 22.97, 22.99, -3.15. Row 8: 15, 23.21, 29.91, 23.19, 26.14, +2.41. Row 9: 14, 26.85, 27.24, 22.27, 23.73, -2.79. Row 10: 13, 24.05, 30.81, 23.85, 26.52, +1.72. Row 11: 10, 23.34, 28.97, 21.79, 24.80, +2.19. Row 12: 9, 19.33, 23.14, 18.88, 22.61, +3.50.

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OTHER VOICES

If federal insurance stands behind every deposit at every bank, then no depositor at any bank will have any incentive to avoid risk.

Bank Rescues Are Stuck on Repeat. How to Break the Cycle.

In 1933, President Franklin D. Roosevelt assured Americans that “all we have to fear is fear itself.” But when it came to federal deposit insurance later that year, FDR thought that a bit of fear would be good for banking-system discipline. He opposed the creation of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp., conceding to it only when the deposit-insurance coverage limit was set at average household savings, about \$58,000 in current dollars.

Depositors today have lost any fear. The deposit-insurance ceiling is now a more-generous \$250,000. Failed banks have been rescued for decades without repercussions for insured depositors. When the prospect of loss suddenly loomed at Silicon Valley Bank, adrenaline rushed back into the system. Depositors with no ability to fight fled, and the banking system almost crumbled. We are left with a vital question: Has Roosevelt’s effort to instill market discipline gone the way of paper bank statements?

No, it hasn’t. We still need market discipline. But yes, how federal deposit insurance operates must change, fast, if we are to avoid a de facto nationalization of the U.S. banking system.

After the creation of FDIC insurance, bank failures gradually became few and far between until the early 1980s. The savings and loan industry became unglued and was rescued in ways that generally protected uninsured depositors. In 1991, Congress mandated that the FDIC always close

BY KAREN PETROU

Petrou is managing partner at Federal Financial Analytics and the author of Engine of Inequality: The Fed and the Future of Wealth in America.

insured depository institutions at the least cost to the Deposit Insurance Fund. This the FDIC dutifully did, but the least-cost way was almost always a sale to another bank, often with a lot of FDIC assistance, that then protected uninsured depositors all over again. In 2008, the FDIC was so alarmed by the scale of the unfolding financial crisis that it first guaranteed all transaction-account balances and then invented a new program backing not just all deposits, but also all of the debt that highflying banks issued before the storm.

As a result, uninsured deposits have been fully protected for as long

as anyone can remember, making market discipline a thing of the way-gone past.

No wonder, then, that Silicon Valley, Signature, and a few other banks were able to fund themselves almost exclusively from uninsured deposits. Depositors thought they took no more risk than had they placed funds at a superconservative entity. That this was a dangerous assumption is all too evident, but thanks to another FDIC rescue, all that uninsured depositors actually lost was a couple of nights’ sleep. This time, the FDIC used the power that Congress gave it in 2010 to designate banks as a systemic risk to pay off depositors.

If federal insurance stands behind every deposit at every bank, then no depositor at any bank will have any incentive to avoid risk. The only way, then, to contain risk would be a still heavier blanket of federal regulation that all but converts U.S. banks into public utilities. This wouldn’t be all that bad if U.S. regulators were more effective, but the failures of two obviously high-risk banks in just three days in March makes it clear that resting banking-system solvency on the backs of federal supervisors is itself a

high-risk proposition.

We need to return to the principle that guided FDR when he decided not to fight the FDIC: federal deposit insurance for those who cannot be expected to perform an in-depth balance-sheet risk analysis every time they open a bank account. The \$250,000 limit achieves this goal for individual depositors, but it fails to uniformly address those acting on those individuals’ behalf. As we saw most graphically in the SVB failure, thousands of workers were suddenly facing the loss of their paycheck not because they had SVB deposits, but because their employers processed payroll through the bank. Depositors must be protected to the extent necessary to ensure that paychecks reach the workers to whom they are due.

This reform resurrects the transaction-account guarantee program that the FDIC temporarily adopted in 2008. It would also protect household checking accounts and the other “operational” deposits that companies cannot keep below the \$250,000 limit but are essential for keeping the lights on.

To be sure, many depositors need to be able to put money in the bank to save for a rainy day, a down payment, retirement, and the like. If only non-interest-bearing deposits are protected, then those unable to judge a bank’s risk might still lose it all in a bank failure. Individual savings accounts opened in the name of a natural person or family should have no upper insurance limit, an easy differentiation that every bank knows quickly how to make.

These firewalls would accomplish the critical purpose of federal deposit insurance: to provide ample protection for those who need it and market discipline for those who don’t. These changes will take new law, which a divided and fractious Congress might find it hard to advance. But advance it they must.

If we don’t quickly fix federal deposit insurance, taxpayers will keep bailing out banks, the banks they bail out will get ever bigger, the costs will rise still higher, and U.S. banking will soon become a captive ward of the state. **B**



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Financial Titanics and Treasuries

To the Editor:

Regarding "Buy the Big Banks" (Cover Story, March 17), do we know their derivative counterparty risk to Credit Suisse and other financial Titanics? Or their exposure to other entities that are counterparties? Buying the banks is particularly fraught, as there is no political appetite for bailing out shareholders this time around.

The three-month T-bill is yielding about 4.5%. You'll happily find me there.

Gene Sweet
Chicago

To the Editor:

While most analysts and journalists have been quick to point out the sizable unrealized mark-to-market loan losses at banks as of Dec. 31, 2022, very few seem to acknowledge that the largest bond rally in 30 years this month may have dramatically cut those losses. Consider that virtually any Treasury of under three years duration purchased in the past three years is almost certainly back to par or in the money now. It will be interesting to see if banks rush out their March 31, 2023,

balance sheets to show their mark-to-market changes.

If you had asked me a month ago whether I would rather own a bank with a huge and historically stable deposit base or a bank with a heavy loan book, I would have chosen the deposit-heavy bank as the safer choice. What we are witnessing right now seems to be more of a harrowing psychological thriller than a horror movie. I won't hazard a guess as to how the movie ends.

Perhaps banks should rush out their March 31, 2023, balance sheets to show the huge improvements in their mark-to-market balance sheets as a result of the biggest bond rally in 30 years. That might help restore confidence.

Eric Swergold
Firestorm Capital
Mill Valley, Calif.

Faulty Accounting Rules

To the Editor:

Eliminating the "held to maturity" portfolio and requiring banks to mark their assets to market could have prevented the problems at Silicon Valley Bank ("Why Regulators Didn't Spot the Risks at Banks—and How to Stop the Next Failure," March 17). Bankers would think twice about putting short-term deposits into long-dated fixed-rate investments if they knew they had to mark them to market each quarter, while potentially having to take losses.

As a retired national bank examiner, I can tell you that the accounting rules allowed this to happen, not the lack of regulatory oversight.

Jim Euge
Huntersville, N.C.

To the Editor:

What has transpired since the implosions of Silicon Valley Bank, Signature Bank, and First Republic should raise many questions about how our banking system is being regulated (or not). The Federal Reserve has been crystal clear that it was going to raise interest rates, hard and fast. That

being the case, both the federal and state regulators had an obligation to pay very close attention to the banks that they are responsible for, so they could potentially mitigate the kind of duration problems that sank SVB before they got out of hand.

We don't need a massive wave of new regulations that further complicate regulators' jobs. We simply need to pay attention to what is happening and act accordingly.

Arthur M. Shatz
Astoria, N.Y.

John Bull

To the Editor:

Perhaps rereading Walter Bagehot's *Lombard Street* will help us put this financial turmoil in context ("Is It Bear Stearns II, or Just a Bear Market? The Fed Is Watching," Up & Down Wall Street, March 17). "John Bull [or the U.S. economy] can stand many things, but he cannot stand 2%." Negative real interest rates will always cause misallocation of capital, and the adjustment is never a soft landing.

Terrence Hormel
On Barrons.com

Counterparty Risk

To the Editor:

I was the treasurer at Expedia during the financial crisis of 2008-09. In fact, toward the latter part of my tenure (2007-13), former Silicon Valley Bank board member Steve Loudon worked for me as assistant treasurer.

In addition to the tips laid out in your piece, corporate chief financial

officers/treasurers need to diligently manage counterparty risk, in light of deposits' uninsured status ("Apple and Other Big Companies Hold Trillions in Cash. Here's the Complex Way They Manage the Risks," Tech Trader, March 17). The deposit is an unsecured obligation of the bank to the depositor. The company has made a short-term loan to the bank. This isn't a secret: It's right there in the—wait for it—*liabilities* section of the banks' balance sheets. It's incumbent on larger depositors to aggressively manage their counterparty risk to ensure preservation of capital and adequate returns.

In my years with Expedia, I found our investment policy (alongside active audit committee involvement) to be a foundational tool in rigorously reviewing, assessing, and limiting counterparty exposures. In our case, the policy allowed a maximum of 10% of our cash balances to reside with any one institution, and specified minimum ratings, capital ratios, etc., of eligible bank counterparties. We also reviewed our banks' financials, filings, and earnings calls. It's inconceivable to me that sophisticated corporate clients of Silicon Valley Bank weren't aware of, and appropriately managing, their exposures.

Perhaps some of the depositors would look at the above and say, "Good grief, we don't want to spend our time doing all that." But if that's the case, then these companies should simply park the cash in Treasuries or Treasury money-market funds. But there's no free lunch—if one wants the extra yield of deposits, then one needs to do the work.

Stuart Haas
Seattle

"The accounting rules allowed this to happen, not the lack of regulatory oversight."

Jim Euge, Huntersville, N.C.

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