FINANCIAL
newsletter

Wealth Architects, LLC

MARCH

# Rates Go Negative

In mid-February, the Bank of Japan (BOJ)—Japan's central bank—lowered its funds interest rate to -0.1 percent. It meant the BOJ would begin charging private Japanese banks for holding on to excess cash reserves.

This negative interest rate policy (NIRP) is not unique to the BOJ. By "going negative," Japan joins the European Central Bank and the central banks of Sweden, Switzerland and Denmark.

Why are so many central banks doing this? Economic growth in several developed countries has recently slowed down as businesses have grown accustomed to low rates. Central bankers hope that pushing rates down into negative territory will help their economies resume expansion.

**How it Works**

To understand how NIRP is supposed to help, try imagining what would happen if your personal bank accounts had negative interest rates. How would you react to paying to save money each month? What changes would you make to your finances?

You probably would reach the same conclusion as most people: "I need to minimize the money in my accounts." One option would be to invest the money so that it has a chance to grow; another option would be to spend it on a major purchase before you need to pay any interest.

These are essentially the same responses governments are hoping to incite from investment banks and large corporations. Economic slowdowns cause businesses to focus on saving money when central banks need them to spend it. The savings penalty created by negative rates squeezes hoarded cash out of corporate accounts and into new business investments.

NIRP also provides a strong signal that a central bank will do whatever it takes to promote healthy inflation and fight against a slowing economy. This means a NIRP can become a type of rallying point for businesses, creating enough confidence in future growth that companies proactively expand and turn their growth expectations into reality.

**Effects at Home**

The BOJ's move to negative rates has raised questions about the future of America's monetary policy. In a world where several central banks have continued to lower rates, the United States has been trying to raise them. Economists and investors wonder whether America will be able to continue bucking the downward trend or if its rate hikes need to be stopped.

Rising interest rates often accompany economic success. Because the United States' economic recovery has drastically outpaced most other developed economies since 2009, it needed to start increasing its interest rates first. As its economy improves, its interest rates should need to be raised.

However, central bank rates must be compared to each other. Although the United States has only recently started raising rates, rate cuts in other countries have led some to believe that its *relative* rates are increasing too quickly. If the relative rates climb too much, the dollar could become too strong and other countries would stop buying U.S. goods, hurting the chances of further U.S. growth.

**Will America Go Negative?**

While anything could happen in the future, most experts currently believe U.S. rates will not go below zero. The U.S. Federal Reserve has said it studies negative rates and simulates them for bank "stress tests" but doesn't envision needing them. After years of aggressive quantitative easing and zero percent interest rates, it's unclear what new benefits negative rates would even provide for the U.S. economy.

It's also important to remember that countries can influence rates in both directions. As the world's two largest economies, the United States and China are in position help stimulate other economies through trade. If their growth and consumption become strong enough, the world economy will improve and rates in other countries will be brought above zero.

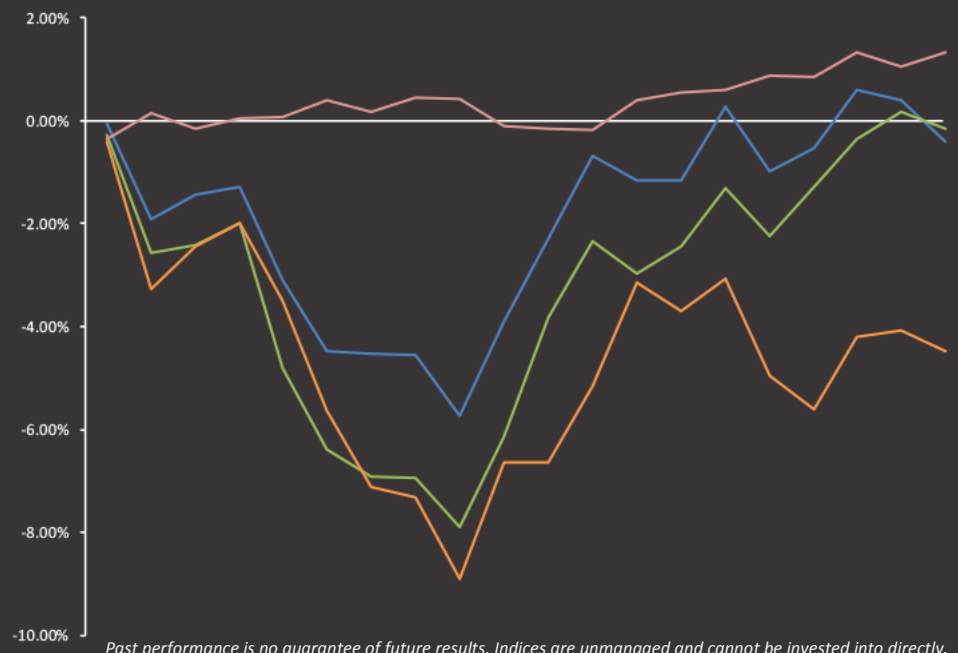
# the market at a glance
# FEBRUARY

**U.S. Large Cap**
(S&P 500)
**1,932.23** (-0.41%) ▼

**U.S. Mid/Small**
(Russell 2000)
**1,033.90** (-0.14%) ▼

**International Large**
(NYSE International 100)
**4333.22** (-4.47%) ▼

**U.S. Bond Market**
(Dow Jones Equal Weight U.S. Issued Corporate Bond Index)
**347.84** (1.33%) ▲




*Past performance is no guarantee of future results. Indices are unmanaged and cannot be invested into directly.*

# The market in action

- The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that average hourly earnings rose sharply in January, increasing by 0.5 percent from the month before. Economists attributed the large jump to higher employment rates and new minimum wage laws in many states.
- Moody's Investor Service downgraded Brazil's credit rating by two levels, officially making its sovereign bonds "junk." Brazil had already received junk ratings from the other two credit rating agencies, Standard & Poor's and Fitch Ratings.
- Thanks to the 2015 surged in the Chinese stock markets, Beijing surpasses New York as the "Billionaire Capital of the World." Beijing is now home to 100 billionaires; New York has 95.
- The U.S. Department of Commerce authorized Cleber LLC, a tractor company, to build a factory in Cuba. It is the first factory a U.S. business has opened in Cuba in over 50 years.
- After seeing its Q4 profits drop more than 90 percent year-over-year, oil giant BP announced plans to cut more than 3,000 jobs before the end of 2017. Nearly all major oil and gas companies have announced workforce reductions during the past few months as oil prices remain at decade lows.
- China announced plans to lay off as many as 1.8M coal miners and steel workers in an effort to reduce industrial overcapacity. While unable to provide a specific timeframe, Chinese officials said the process will take years.
- International Business Machines Corporation (IBM) agreed to buy Truven Health Analytics for $2.6B. It is the latest in IBM's steady acquisition of health-data companies as it works to improve the diagnostic capabilities of its "Watson" supercomputer program.
- Home-flooring producer Lumber Liquidator saw its market value tumble as the Center for Disease Control releases estimates showing that chemicals in some of the company's laminate flooring poses a cancer risk of six to 30 cases per 100,000 individuals. Lumber Liquidators stopped selling the contaminated flooring in early 2015

# Tax Reference: 2015

## Tax Rates

### Single

| *Tax Bracket* | *Base Tax* | *Marginal Tax Rate* |
|---|---|---|
| $0 - $9,225 | $0 | 10.0% |
| $9,226 - $37,450 | $923 | 15.0% |
| $37,451 - $90,750 | $5,156 | 25.0% |
| $90,751 - $189,300 | $18,481 | 28.0% |
| $189,301 - $411,500 | $46,075 | 33.0% |
| $411,501 - $413,200 | $119,401 | 35.0% |
| $413,201 and over | $119,996 | 39.6% |

### Married Filing Jointly

| *Tax Bracket* | *Base Tax* | *Marginal Tax Rate* |
|---|---|---|
| $0 - $18,450 | $0 | 10.0% |
| $18,451 - $74,900 | $1,845 | 15.0% |
| $74,901  $151,200 | $10,313 | 25.0% |
| $151,201 - $230,450 | $29,388 | 28.0% |
| $230,451 - $411,500 | $51,578 | 33.0% |
| $411,501 - $464,850 | $111,324 | 35.0% |
| $464,851 and over | $129,997 | 39.6% |

### Married Filing Separately

| *Tax Bracket* | *Base Tax* | *Marginal Tax Rate* |
|---|---|---|
| $0 - $9,225 | $0 | 10.0% |
| $9,226 - $37,450 | $923 | 15.0% |
| $37,451 - $75,600 | $5,156 | 25.0% |
| $75,601 - $115,225 | $14,694 | 28.0% |
| $115,226 - $205,750 | $25,789 | 33.0% |
| $205,751 - $232,425 | $55,662 | 35.0% |
| $232,426 and over | $64,989 | 39.6% |

### Head of Household

| *Tax Bracket* | *Base Tax* | *Marginal Tax Rate* |
|---|---|---|
| $0 - $13,150 | $0 | 10.0% |
| $13,151 - $50,200 | $1,315 | 15.0% |
| $50,201 - $129,600 | $6,873 | 25.0% |
| $129,601 - $209,850 | $26,723 | 28.0% |
| $209,851 - $411,500 | $49,193 | 33.0% |
| $411,501 - $439,000 | $115,737 | 35.0% |
| $439,001 and over | $125,362 | 39.6% |

## Alternative Minimum Tax

| | *Exemption Amount* | *28% tax rate applies at* |
|---|---|---|
| Single and head of household | $53,600 | $185,400 |
| Married filing jointly and surviving spouses | $83,400 | $185,400 |
| Married filing separately | $41,700 | $92,700 |

## Capital Gains

| *Marginal Tax Rate* | *Short-term Capital Gains Rate* | *Long-term Capital Gains and Qualified Dividends Rate* |
|---|---|---|
| 10.0% | 10.0% | 0.0% |
| 15.0% | 15.0% | 0.0% |
| 25.0% | 25.0% | 15.0% |
| 28.0% | 28.0% | 15.0% |
| 33.0% | 33.0% | 15.0% |
| 35.0% | 35.0% | 15.0% |
| 39.6% | 39.6% | 20.0% |

## Standard Deduction

| | *Regular* | *65+ or blind* |
|---|---|---|
| Single | $6,300 | $1,550 |
| Married filing jointly | $12,600 | $1,250 |
| Married filing separately | $6,300 | $1,250 |
| Head of household | $9,250 | $1,550 |
| Dependent child | $1,050 | |

## Itemized Deductions - Pease Phase-out

| | *AGI Phase-outs* |
|---|---|
| Single | $258,250 |
| Married filing jointly | $309,900 |
| Married filing separately | $154,950 |
| Head of household | $284,050 |

## Personal Exemptions

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Dollar amount | $4,000 | |
| **AGI Phase-outs** | *Start* | *End* |
| Single | $258,250 | $380,750 |
| Married filing jointly | $309,900 | $432,400 |
| Married filing separately | $154,950 | $216,200 |
| Head of household | $284,050 | $406,550 |

2% for each 1,250 of AGI for MFS

2% for each 2,500 of AGI for all other statuses

*(amounts indexed for inflation)*

## Individual U.S. Tax Deadlines

**Filing Deadlines**

| | |
|---|---|
| April 15 | Regular filing |
| October 15 | Extended filing |

**Estimated Tax Deadlines**

| | |
|---|---|
| April 15, 2015 | 1st Quarter |
| June 15, 2015 | 2nd Quarter |
| September 15, 2015 | 3rd Quarter |
| January 15, 2016 | 4th Quarter |

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## Gift and Estate Tax Exclusions and Credits

| | |
|---|---|
| Maximum estate, gift & GST rates | 40% |
| Estate, gift & GST exclusions | $5,430,000 |
| Gift tax annual exclusion | $14,000 |

## Contribution Limits

| | |
|---|---|
| Elective deferrals<br>*401(k), 403(b), 457(b)(2) and 457(c)(1)* | $18,000 |
| Catch-up elective deferrals | $6,000 |
| SIMPLE plan deferral | $12,500 |
| SIMPLE plan catch-up elective deferrals | $3,000 |
| SEP coverage | $600 |
| Annual compensation limit for most plans | $265,000 |
| Defined benefit plan benefit | $210,000 |
| Defined contribution plan annual contributions | $53,000 |

## Individual Retirement Accounts

| | *Contribution Limits* |
|---|---|
| IRA contributions | $5,500 |
| IRA catch-up contributions | $1,000 |
| | *Income Limits* |
| **Traditional nondeductible** | None |
| **Traditional deductible** | |
| Single and head of household | $61,001 - $71,000 |
| Joint (covered by plan) | $98,001 - $118,000 |
| Joint (one spouse covered by plan) | $183,001 - $193,000 |
| Married filing separately (and active participant) | $0 - $10,000 |
| **Roth** | |
| Single and head of household | $116,000 - $131,000 |
| Married filing jointly | $183,001 - $193,000 |
| Married filing separately (and active participant) | $0 - $10,000 |
| **Roth Conversion** | None |

## Education Credits and Deductions

| | *Annual limit* | *AGI phase-outs* |
|---|---|---|
| American Opportunity Credit (credit excludes MFS) | $2,500 | $160,000 – $180,000 joint<br>$80,000 – $90,000 all others |
| Lifetime Learning Credit | $2,000 | $110,000 – $130,000 joint<br>$55,000 – $65,000 all others |
| Student loan interest deduction | $2,500 | $130,000 – $160,000 joint<br>$65,000 – $80,000 all others |

## Child Tax Credit

| | |
|---|---|
| Credit per child | $1,000 |

## Long-term Care

**Limitation on premiums deduction**

| *Age* | *Limitation* |
|---|---|
| 40 or less | $380 |
| 41-50 | $710 |
| 51-60 | $1,430 |
| 61-70 | $3,800 |
| Over 70 | $4,750 |

## Health Savings Accounts

| | |
|---|---|
| **Individuals** | |
| Maximum deductible contribution | $3,350 |
| Catch-up contribution | $1,000 |
| Minimum annual deductible | $1,300 |
| Expense limits for deductibles and copays | $6,450 |
| **Families** | |
| Maximum deductible contribution | $6,650 |
| Catch-up contribution | $1,000 |
| Minimum annual deductible | $2,600 |
| Expense limits for deductibles and copays | $12,900 |

## Social Security and Medicare Taxes

| | |
|---|---|
| Social Security wage base | $118,500 |
| Social Security employee/employer tax rate | 6.20% |
| Maximum tax payable | $7,347 |
| Medicare employee/employer tax rate | 1.45% |
| Medicare surtax rate | 0.90% |
| Medicare surtax starts at: | $200,000 single and HOH<br>$250,000 joint<br>$125,000 MFS |
| Medicare net investment income surtax rate | 3.80% |
| Medicare investment surtax starts at MAGI of: | $200,000 single and HOH<br>$250,000 joint<br>$125,000 MFS |

## Saver's Credit

| *Credit Rate* | *Married Filing Jointly* | *Head of Household* | *All Other Filers* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 50% of your contribution | AGI not more than $36,500 | AGI not more than $27,375 | AGI not more than $18,250 |
| 20% of your contribution | $36,501 - $39,500 | $27,376 - $29,625 | $18,251 - $19,750 |
| 10% of your contribution | $39,501 - $61,000 | $29,626 - $45,750 | $19,751 - $30,500 |
| 0% of your contribution | more than $61,000 | more than $45,750 | more than $30,500 |