



EVERETT FINANCIAL GROUP

## Weekly Commentary

October 19, 2020



### The Fever Factor

Napoleon Bonaparte had big plans for the vast territory that France held in North America. In 1802 he sent an army under the command of General Charles Leclerc, his brother-in-law, to take control of New Orleans and open the door for a new wave of French colonist to populate what he hoped would be a thriving New France.

Napoleon ordered Leclerc to stop off along the way and reestablish French rule in Haiti, which had been wracked by a bloody slave rebellion. The Haitians were no match for the crack French troops, who won control of the island in a matter of weeks. But then a more deadly enemy emerged.

The mosquito.

Spring rains brought clouds of mosquitoes and an outbreak of yellow fever. The local population was largely immune; not so the French soldiers. Tens of thousands perished. Leclerc himself died in October of 1802. Reinforcements arrived, but many of them also succumbed to the disease. Meantime, the freed slaves of Haiti renewed the fight against

their weakened enemy, taking a severe toll with persistent guerrilla attacks.

For France, it was nothing short of a debacle. Between the disease and the fighting, an estimated fifty thousand French soldiers died, and the rest surrendered in 1803. With his army gone and his brother-in-law dead, Napoleon gave up on his dreams for the new world, deciding instead to sell France's land in North America to the United States.

The Louisiana Purchase doubled the size of the young country. But it might never have taken place without the resilient rebels and the unmerciful mosquitoes of Haiti.

*The Louisiana Purchase added 828,000 square miles of land to the United States. The purchase price was \$15 million, which comes out to a mere three cents on acre.*

*The slave rebellion in Haiti was led by Toussaint L'Ouverture, a former slave who had established himself there as "Governor-for-life." He quickly agreed to an armistice with the French, who showed their gratitude by kidnapping him and sending him off to a French prison, where he died before he could see Haiti achieve full independence in 1803.*

*It wasn't until nearly one hundred years later that U.S Army doctor Walter Reed proved that yellow fever is transmitted by mosquitoes.*

The Greatest War Stories Never Told By Rick Beyer

## Weekly Market Commentary October 19, 2020

### The Markets

It was a turbulent week for investors.

Waves of positive and negative news buffeted financial markets last week:

#### **The financial sector delivered upbeat earnings news**

Currently, many financial companies in the Standard & Poor's 500 Index have reported third quarter earnings and have done better than expected. Despite upbeat earnings, some companies' shares declined because of uncertainty about the path of economic recovery. If recovery continues, some banks may have excess reserves; however, if recovery falters and a double-dip recession occurs, banks may need to add to reserves, reported *Barron's*.

#### **Coronavirus cases surged across the United States and Europe**

A rapid rise in the number of COVID-19 cases worried investors at home and in Europe. New restrictions intended to slow the spread of the virus were implemented in France and the United Kingdom. A source cited by *Financial Times* reported, "...economists and investors had not expected governments to allow the virus to reach the point it has now."

#### **Two treatment and vaccine trials paused**

The surge of new cases was compounded by setbacks in the search for effective coronavirus treatments and vaccines. Two COVID-19 trials, one for a treatment and one for a vaccine, were temporarily put on hold because of safety concerns.

## Retail sales were strong, but manufacturing and industrial production weren't

Last week, economic data provided a mixed picture of the economy. On the plus side, September's retail sales were stronger than expected despite the tapering of unemployment benefits. On the negative side, U.S. manufacturing and industrial production both came in below expectations, reported *Financial Times*.

## The number of Americans filing for unemployment benefits increased

The number of people filing for first-time unemployment benefits was higher than expected, and higher than it had been for the past two weeks, even though California had temporarily stopped processing new claims. Almost 3 million people filed for extended benefits, meaning they'd been unemployed for 26 weeks or more. Overall, more than 25 million people relied on unemployment benefits last week.

Major U.S. stock indices eked out gains last week.

Data as of 10/16/20	1-Week	Y-T-D	1-Year	3-Year	5-Year	10-Year
Standard & Poor's 500 (Domestic Stocks)	0.2%	7.8%	16.5%	10.9%	11.4%	11.4%
Dow Jones Global ex-U.S.	-1.0	-4.4	2.4	-1.0	2.9	1.6
10-year Treasury Note (Yield Only)	0.7	NA	1.8	2.3	2.2	2.5
Gold (per ounce)	-1.0	25.1	28.3	13.5	10.0	3.4
Bloomberg Commodity Index	0.2	-9.3	-6.3	-5.2	-4.0	-6.6

Dow Jones Global ex-US, Gold, Bloomberg Commodity Index returns exclude reinvested dividends (gold does not pay a dividend) and the three-, five-, and 10-year returns are annualized; and the 10-year Treasury Note is simply the yield at the close of the day on each of the historical time periods.

Sources: Yahoo! Finance, MarketWatch, djindexes.com, London Bullion Market Association.

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

**ONE DOLLAR IS A LOT LIKE ANOTHER, ISN'T IT?** In theory, we think of all money in the same way. In practice, we don't.

Money is fungible. That means one dollar has the same value as another dollar or four quarters or ten dimes or 100 pennies. If you are buying something valued at \$1.00, you can purchase it with \$1.00 in bills or coins.

However, when making financial decisions, people tend to engage in something called mental accounting. One aspect of mental accounting is assigning labels that identify the intended purpose of money. Sometimes this decision-making shortcut can improve financial choices. Other times, it can produce a financial setback.

## Mental accounting often guides spending and saving decisions

A common mental shortcut is budgeting. People and companies rely on budgets to help them make sound financial decisions. Typically, budgets allot specific amounts of income to spending and saving. For an individual:

- Spendable money may go to housing, food, utilities, clothing, entertainment, and other expenses.
- Saved money may go into emergency, vacation, retirement, or other savings

accounts.

When people categorize money, they are reluctant to spend it on other things. *Behavioral Economics* reported, "When a resource [in this case, money] is divided into smaller units...consumers encounter additional decision points - a psychological hurdle encouraging them to stop and think...opening a partitioned pool of resources incurs a psychological transgression cost, such as feelings of guilt."

In other words, your brain will be reluctant to spend your retirement savings on a vacation.

### **Some shortcuts lead to irrational financial decisions**

Mental accounting is a double-edged sword. If people do not think flexibly then mental accounting can cost them. For instance, focusing too intensely on labels can result in decisions that hurt your financial position rather than help it. *Kiplinger's* provided an example:

"Mental accounting leads us to hoard money in a savings account that earns 0.3 percent interest while keeping a high balance on a 15 percent-interest credit card. We like the psychological comfort we get from having money in the bank, even though transferring cash from savings to pay off a credit-card balance can essentially 'earn' us a quick 14.7 percent."

Like many things, mental accounting can be helpful or hurtful, depending on how it's applied.

## **Weekly Focus - Think About It**

"A long habit of not thinking a thing wrong, gives it a superficial appearance of being right, and raises at first a formidable outcry in defense of custom. But the tumult soon subsides. Time makes more converts than reason."

--*Thomas Paine, Author of 'Common Sense'*

Best Regards,



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\* The Standard & Poor's 500 (S&P 500) is an unmanaged group of securities considered to be representative of the stock market in general. You cannot invest directly in this index.

\* All indexes referenced are unmanaged. The volatility of indexes could be materially different from that of a client's portfolio. Unmanaged index returns do not reflect fees, expenses, or sales charges. Index performance is not indicative of the performance of any investment. You cannot invest directly in an index.

\* The Dow Jones Global ex-U.S. Index covers approximately 95% of the market capitalization of the 45 developed and emerging countries included in the Index.

\* The 10-year Treasury Note represents debt owed by the United States Treasury to the public. Since the U.S. Government is seen as a risk-free borrower, investors use the 10-year Treasury Note as a benchmark for the long-term bond market.

\* Gold represents the afternoon gold price as reported by the London Bullion Market Association. The gold price is set twice daily by the London Gold Fixing Company at 10:30 and 15:00 and is expressed in U.S. dollars per fine troy ounce.

\* The Bloomberg Commodity Index is designed to be a highly liquid and diversified benchmark for the commodity futures market. The Index is composed of futures contracts on 19 physical commodities and was launched on July 14, 1998.

\* The DJ Equity All REIT Total Return Index measures the total return performance of the

equity subcategory of the Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT) industry as calculated by Dow Jones.

\* The Dow Jones Industrial Average (DJIA), commonly known as "The Dow," is an index representing 30 stock of companies maintained and reviewed by the editors of The Wall Street Journal.

\* The NASDAQ Composite is an unmanaged index of securities traded on the NASDAQ system.

\* International investing involves special risks such as currency fluctuation and political instability and may not be suitable for all investors. These risks are often heightened for investments in emerging markets.

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

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