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Lowest Rates in 2 Months Face Big Test Next Week

One great (frustrating) thing about financial market discourse is the fact that so many words have more than one meaning. **"Test"** is a good example. Among analysts, "test" can refer to an attempt to break through a certain barrier in any given market. With that in mind, this week saw several important tests, and next week promises at least one more.

This week's test focuses on a sort of "magic line" for rates--a distinction it earned by acting as a firm floor in March. With rates finally gaining some ground after a horrible start to 2018, this magic line was a **reminder** of the lingering headwinds that **made things horrible** in the first place (Fed tightening, increased Treasury issuance to pay for fiscal policies, and upside risks to economic growth and inflation from those fiscal policies).

Staring down the magic line back in late March, we knew we'd need help from something big and economically threatening (bad economic news tends to help rates). **Enter the trade war.** Trade tensions were already on the radar but the late March tariff announcement (the one that focused on China) caused enough of a stir to help rates break below the magic line.

Before we look at the magic line on a chart, let's give credit where it's due. Much of the bond market demand in late March and in general over the past few weeks has come courtesy of **panicked stock market selling.** As money flees stocks, some of it seeks safer havens in the bond market. Excess demand for bonds pushes rates lower, all other things being equal.

National Average Mortgage Rates

	Rate	Change	Points
Mortgage News Daily			
30 Yr. Fixed	6.43%	+0.02	0.00
15 Yr. Fixed	5.95%	0.00	0.00
30 Yr. FHA	5.82%	+0.02	0.00
30 Yr. Jumbo	6.62%	0.00	0.00
5/1 ARM	6.28%	-0.01	0.00
Freddie Mac			
30 Yr. Fixed	6.35%	-0.51	0.00
15 Yr. Fixed	5.51%	-0.65	0.00

Rates as of: 8/30

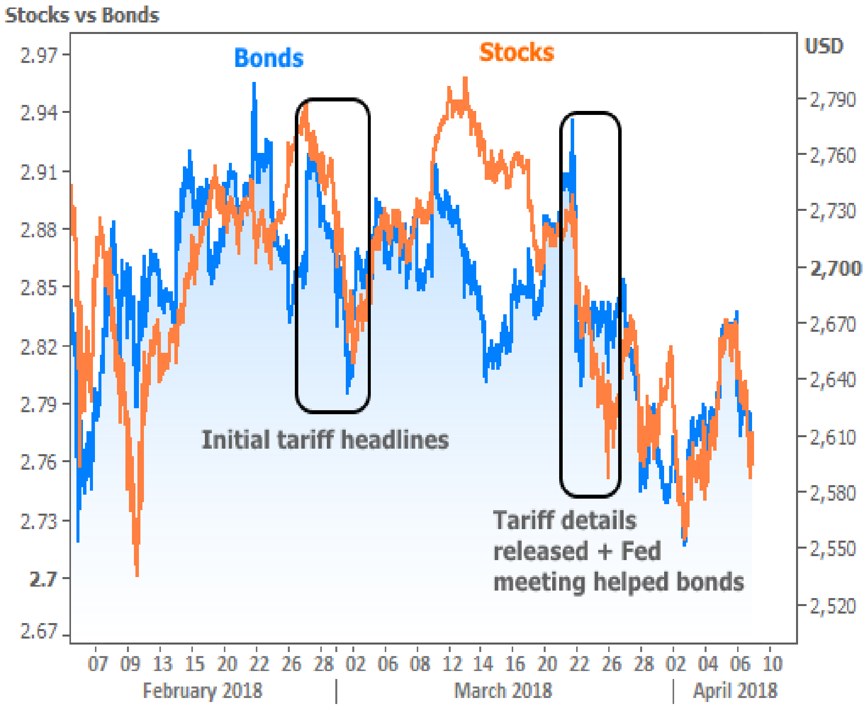
Market Data

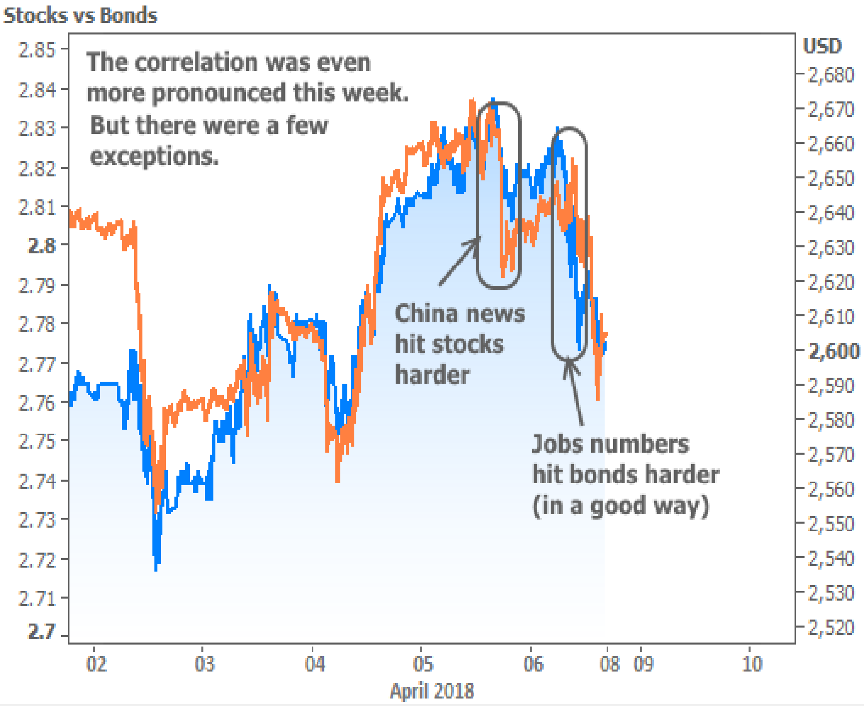
	Price / Yield	Change
MBS UMBS 5.0	99.35	-0.16
MBS GNMA 5.0	99.91	-0.04
10 YR Treasury	3.9039	+0.0424
30 YR Treasury	4.1932	+0.0468

Pricing as of: 8/30 5:59PM EST

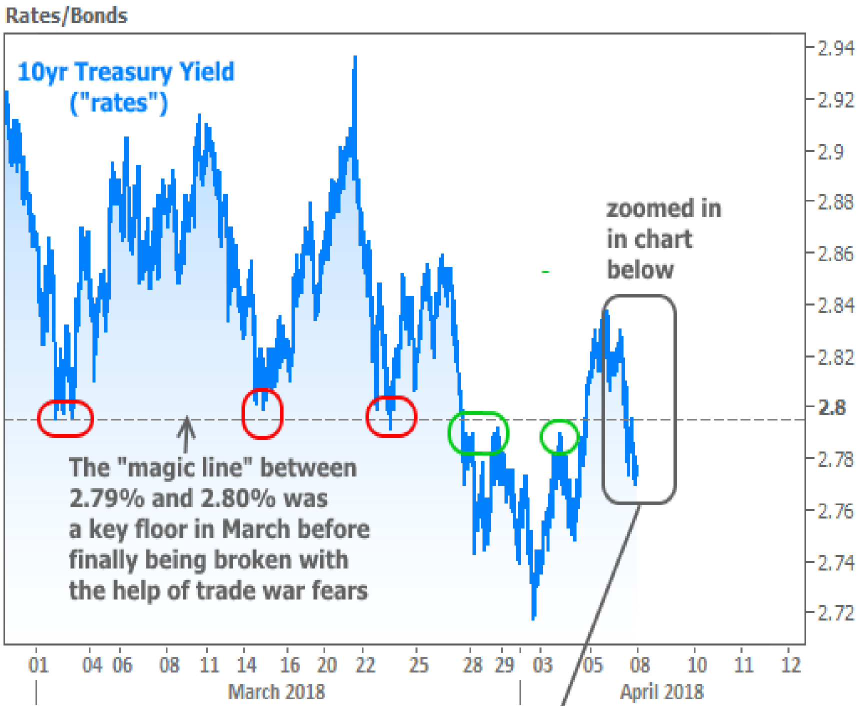
Recent Housing Data

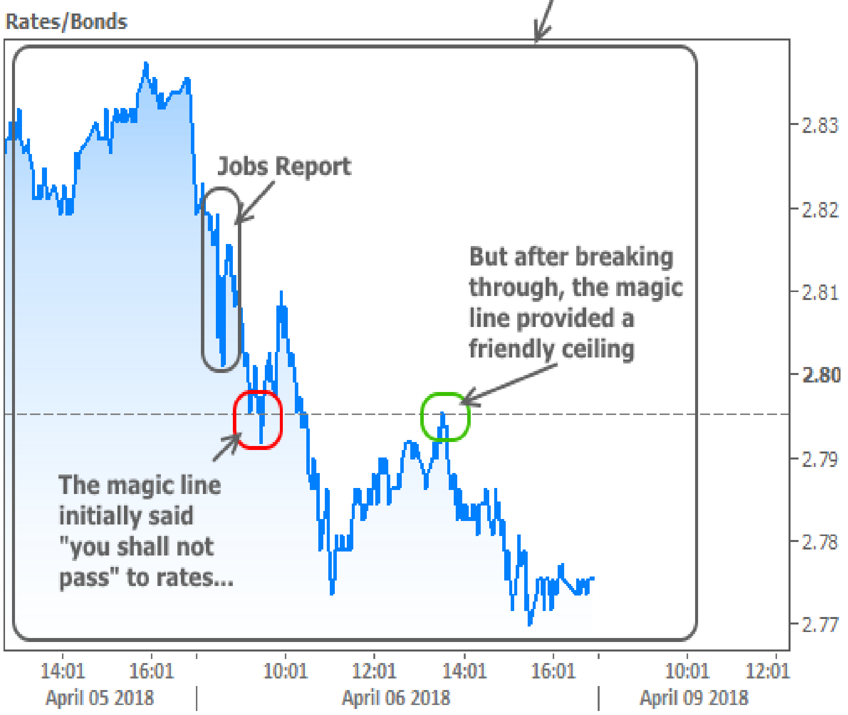
		Value	Change
Mortgage Apps	Aug 28	226.9	+0.49%
Building Permits	Mar	1.46M	-3.95%
Housing Starts	Mar	1.32M	-13.15%
New Home Sales	Mar	693K	+4.68%
Pending Home Sales	Feb	75.6	+1.75%
Existing Home Sales	Feb	3.97M	-0.75%
Builder Confidence	Mar	51	+6.25%





As the chart suggests, stocks and bonds have been well correlated, but each retains **some** of its own motivations. In late March, the Fed Announcement (and press conference) did more to help bonds than to hurt stocks. This week, China's retaliatory tariff threats caused a sharper drop in stock prices than bond yields. Finally, Friday's jobs numbers also helped bonds/rates more than they hurt stocks. And that's where we see the magic happen:



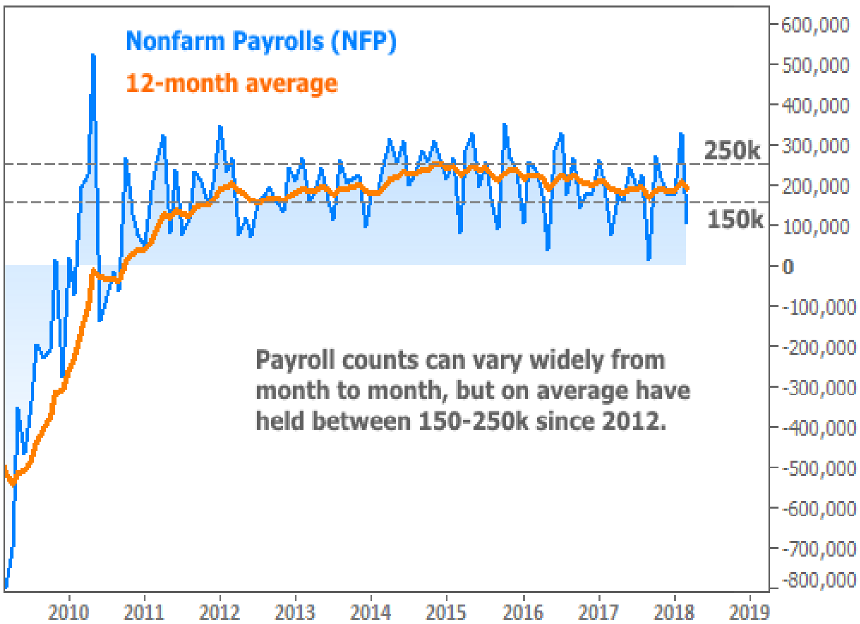


Another **successful "test"** of the magic line! The green circle is something analysts like to see when looking at charts. Any time rates break through an important line in the sand, it adds validity to the breakout if rates return to the broken line and bounce on the other side.

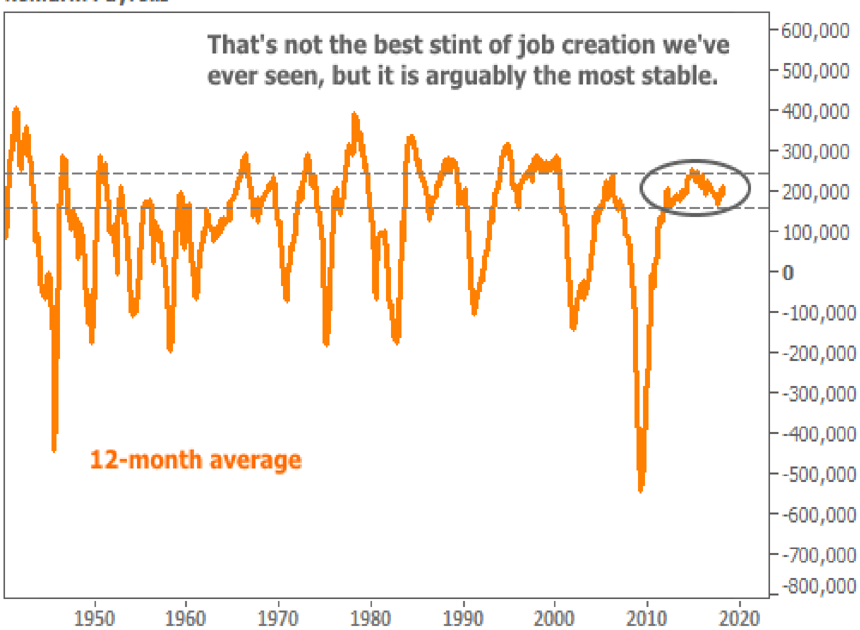
The hope is that the once strong floor will be a strong ceiling. Unfortunately, the direction of rates won't be dictated solely by the tea-leaf signals in the charts. There's an **actual test** coming up for rates next week. It has to do with April's most important inflation report: The Consumer Price Index (CPI).

While there are many measures of inflation, CPI currently has the biggest impact on rates. Inflation is a key component of interest rates, but its importance was **utterly crushed** by the post-crisis economic environment. But it won't stay crushed forever. Even with downbeat reports like this week's jobs numbers, the labor market continues to be in one of its best expansions ever. This leads traders to wonder when the good economic data will finally translate to a more meaningful uptick in inflation.

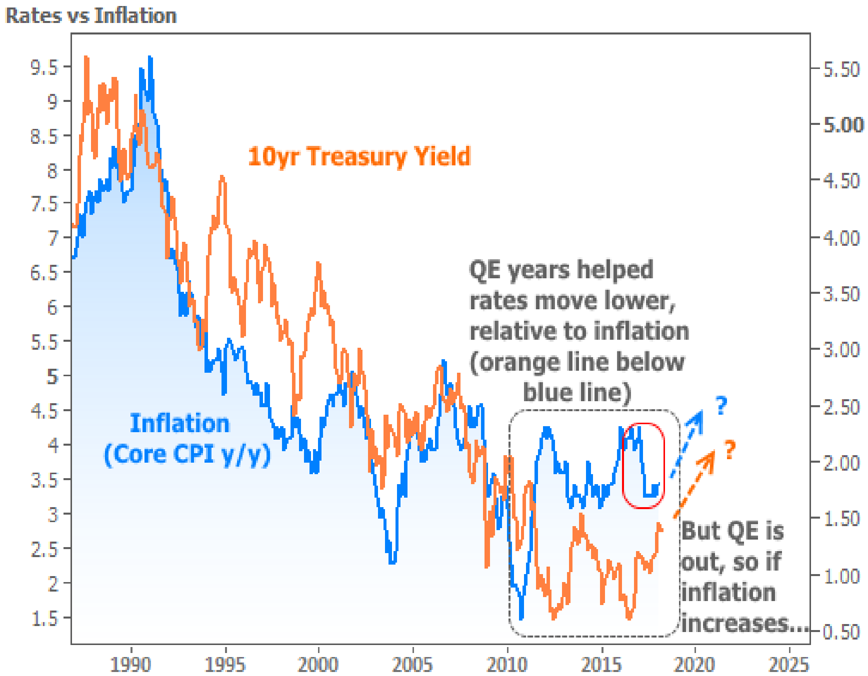
Nonfarm Payrolls



Nonfarm Payrolls

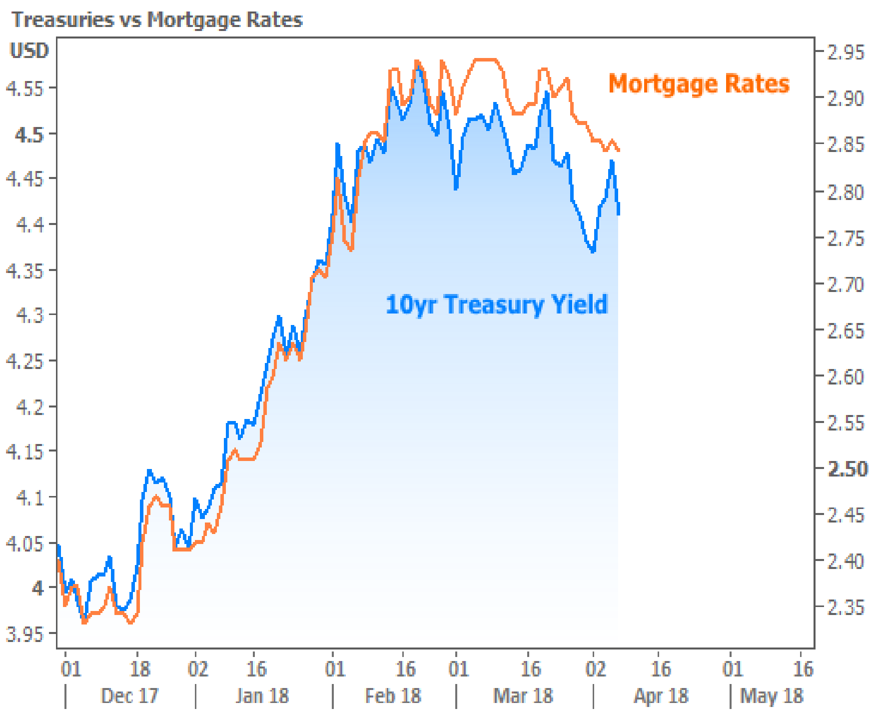


It looked like that uptick had finally arrived in 2016, but by the middle of 2017, we'd seen a surprise downturn in CPI (red circle below). This **helped put rising rates on hold**, but it also meant that investors were that much more vigilant about the next move higher. To understand why inflation is such a big concern for rates, consider the following chart. Note the orange line (rates) holding higher relative to the blue line (inflation) until 2011 (the era of central bank bond buying, which artificially depresses rates).



Now that central banks are **removing** accommodation, the orange line should gravitate back toward the blue line. In other words, rates should go higher, **relative** to inflation. With that in mind, if next week's CPI numbers make it look like the blue line is embarking on another journey higher, it would have seriously negative connotations for rates. Of course inflation could come in **lower** than expected and end up helping rates too!

Either way, it has **at least** as much market moving potential for rates as anything else (like trade war headlines). The biggest risk to rates is that something happens to sooth trade war fears AND the CPI data comes in stronger than expected. Fortunately, big moves in rates have been measured in fractions of percentage points for the past few months, and mortgage rates have been much slower to react than Treasuries.



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Recent Economic Data

Date	Event	Actual	Forecast	Prior
Monday, Apr 02				
10:00AM	Mar ISM Manufacturing PMI	59.3	60.0	60.8
10:00AM	Feb Construction spending (%)	0.1	0.5	0.0
Wednesday, Apr 04				
8:15AM	Mar ADP National Employment (k)	241	205	235
10:00AM	Feb Factory orders mm (%)	1.2	1.7	-1.4
10:00AM	Mar ISM N-Mfg PMI	58.8	59.0	59.5
Thursday, Apr 05				
8:30AM	w/e Jobless Claims (k)	242	231	215
Friday, Apr 06				
8:30AM	Mar Non-farm payrolls (k)	103	193	313
8:30AM	Mar Unemployment rate mm (%)	4.1	4.0	4.1
Tuesday, Apr 10				
8:30AM	Mar Producer Prices (%)	+0.3	0.1	0.2
8:30AM	Mar Core Producer Prices YY (%)	+2.7	2.6	2.5
10:00AM	Feb Wholesale inventories mm (%)	+1.0	0.9	1.1
1:00PM	3-Yr Note Auction (bl)	30		
Wednesday, Apr 11				
7:00AM	w/e Mortgage Market Index	380.6		388.1
8:30AM	Feb Core CPI Year/Year (%)		1.8	1.8
8:30AM	Mar CPI mm, sa (%)	-0.1	0.0	0.2
1:00PM	10-yr Note Auction (bl)	21		
Thursday, Apr 12				
8:30AM	Mar Import prices mm (%)			0.4
8:30AM	Mar Export prices mm (%)	+0.3	0.2	0.2
8:30AM	w/e Jobless Claims (k)	233	230	242
Friday, Apr 13				
10:00AM	Apr 5yr Inflation Outlook (%)	2.4		2.5
10:00AM	Apr 1yr Inflation Outlook (%)	+2.7		2.8
10:00AM	Apr Consumer Sentiment	97.8	100.5	101.4

Event Importance:

No Stars = Insignificant
☆ Low
★ Moderate
★★ Important
★★ Very Important

Service oriented, responsive, competitive rates and an in depth knowledge of todays mortgage market

After completing my degree in finance at the University of Connecticut, I started in the mortgage business right out of college in 2004. With 15+ years of experience and a primary objective of thoroughly explaining all available loan options to my clients with what is typically the largest investment in their lives, I strive to always make myself available. I constantly educate myself with respect to the mortgage industry and underwriting guidelines for FHA, VA, conventional and jumbo financing. I deliver on the expectations discussed up front and provide the service level my clients deserve from day one. I will remain in touch throughout the process and continue to follow up with you after closing. My goal is to wow you and turn you into clients for life. I want you to be so impressed that throughout and after the process you share my information with your friends, family, neighbors and co-workers who may value from my services.

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