# **Covenant** Asset Management, LLC

## Second Quarter 2020 Investment Perspectives

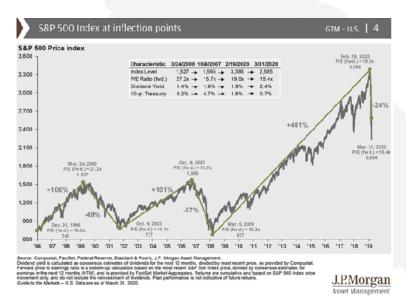
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#### Economic and Financial Markets Review & Outlook



Covenant Asset Management is pleased to offer our latest investment perspectives. In this publication we review first quarter results and highlight key economic, financial and political themes which we expect will drive markets and investment performance in the coming months.

It is almost hard to believe what the world has experienced in the past two months. In January, the focus was on impeachment, trade deals and an economy that appeared poised to accelerate. When the coronavirus was first mentioned, it was thought it would be limited to China and might not easily transmit from human to human. Misinformation coming from China and the World Health Organization delayed responses by the U.S. and many other countries that could have prevented the virus from turning into a global pandemic. Once it became clearer how easily transmittable and potentially deadly the virus is, health experts began to model some very dire projections concerning the



#### **KEY THEMES**

- 1. The coronavirus and subsequent shutdowns created an unprecedented economic and financial market environment.
- 2. Rapid and massive monetary and fiscal policy responses have cushioned the economic and market collapse from the worst case scenarios.
- All eyes are now focused on when the spread of the virus slows enough to allow for the reopening of parts of economy.
- 4. Given the enormous financial shock, we expect uncertainties and volatility to remain high in the weeks ahead.

number of infections and deaths. These projections set off alarms that healthcare systems could be overwhelmed and unable to handle the volume of cases. These experts recommended a plan to "flatten the curve" of new coronavirus cases through social distancing, ultimately resulting in the shutdown of most non-essential services in the U.S., Europe and many countries around the world.

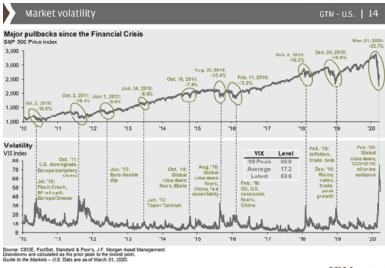
The economic and financial markets shock that has occurred is both unprecedented and understandable. Consumer spending represents nearly 70% of the U.S. economy. With most retail, restaurants, travel and leisure and live entertainment forced to shut down, the job and economic loss is immense. In the past two weeks, a record-shattering 10 million Americans filed for unemployment benefits. That number is expected to rise considerably in coming

#### **Economic and Financial Markets Review**



weeks. The unemployment rate, which stood near record lows a few weeks ago, could rise to 10-15% or more until businesses are allowed to reopen. Before the coronavirus crisis, U.S. GDP growth was expected to average 2.5%-3.0% for 2020. At this point, it is safe to say GDP will contract substantially in the first half of the year. It is premature to predict the timing and shape of the recovery until we have a better sense of when businesses will be allowed to reopen and what restrictions will be placed upon social gatherings. As more and more businesses and social activities began to close in early March, markets reacted to the news by plummeting in a violent and unprecedented fashion. In the quickest time on record, 19 trading days, stocks fell into a bear market. From peak-totrough, the Dow Industrials declined by 37%, the S&P 500 by 34% and the small-cap Russell 2000 Index by 43%. The Federal Reserve Bank moved rapidly to cut interest rates to zero and pour trillions of dollars into the economy to provide needed liquidity and shore up the banking system and capital markets. Shortly thereafter, Congress and the Trump Administration agreed to a massive \$2.2 trillion economic relief package to help bridge the gap between the shuttering of large parts of the U.S. economy and a staged reopening. These actions prompted a ferocious rebound as stock indexes surged by more than 20% in three days from the March 23 bottom. After a brief pullback, stocks jumped again during the first week of April, as optimism rose that the curve of new infections may be plateauing.

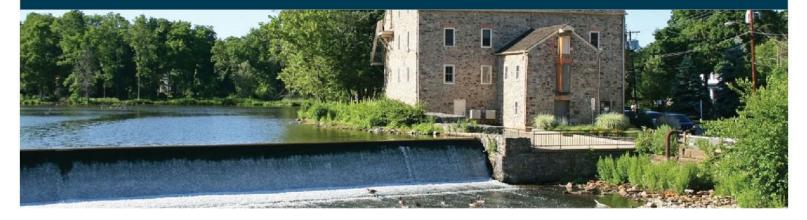
We know that markets are forward looking and are better indicators of future activity than are economists and investment strategists. However, a great deal of uncertainty lies ahead for global economies and the ability of investors to correctly predict the shape and speed of recovery is limited. Much will depend upon when parts of the economy are allowed to reopen and at what pace consumers are willing to engage in social activities once certain restrictions are lifted.



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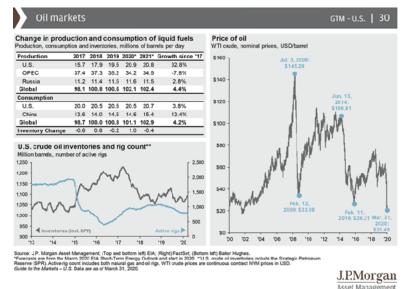
Warmer days, higher humidity and more intense ultraviolet light during the summer months may cause the spread of the virus to subside for a time. Health experts caution that the virus is likely to come back again in the fall. In the meantime, a number of offlabel, anti-viral therapies are currently being tested in the field, while new anti-viral drug and monoclonal antibody trials are being conducted by numerous researchers at a rapid pace. The first FDA-approved therapeutics are not expected before the end of the summer. A number of vaccines are also being lab tested, with clinical trials to follow.

#### **Economic and Financial Markets Challenges**



Approved vaccines are not expected to be available for 12-18 months. Until a treatment is available or a vaccine is approved, it is unlikely all activities will resume in the same way they were before the outbreak. New guidelines and testing requirements may allow certain regions and business types to reopen by mid-spring to early summer. Density of population and intensity of the disease spread are likely to play a role in the reopening. In the coming months, a staged resumption of many economic activities is expected. However, large social gatherings like conventions and sporting events may take longer to resume. Much will depend on the progress of testing, tracking the disease spread and treatment options. Because of the uncertainty of the pace and extent of reopening shuttered activities, the depth and duration of the pandemic's disruption is still unclear. This, in turn, limits the ability to forecast economic activity. We expect markets to remain unusually volatile until a path to some semblance of normalcy becomes clearer.

As much as the federal government would like to provide whatever support it can during this crisis, no one can anticipate every economic dislocation or hardship. Funding gaps are likely to occur for certain industries, groups or people. Some of the gaps may be caught and fixed while others may slip through the cracks and produce areas of concern. From an investment standpoint, we are doing our best to assess the financial health of the companies owned in our client's portfolios to confirm their ability to weather the storm and recover and prosper once the storm has passed. One sector that has been hard hit is energy.



With demand down due to contracting economic activity and increased supply from a production dispute between the Russians and the Saudis, oil prices have plummeted. The oil price decline poses a major threat to small and mid-size U.S. energy companies. If the present low level of oil prices continues, some energy companies may be unable to service their debt, likely causing credit rating downgrades and loan defaults that could place additional pressure on bank lenders, the economy, and markets. In many other industries, because of the great uncertainties, companies have already revised expectations sharply lower or withdrawn guidance altogether. More and more companies are also suspending dividends and share buyback programs. Share buybacks have provided an important source of support for stock prices in the past. The loss of that support may inhibit the recovery opportunities for those companies who have chosen to or been forced to suspend their programs.



In the aftermath of the September 11 terror attacks, the 9/11 Commission attributed our unpreparedness for the attacks to a failure of imagination. In some ways, our government may have been quilty of the same failure of imagination, when it came to our preparedness to respond to the outbreak of a novel virus. But, just like in the days after 9/11, our leaders have mobilized a rapid and effective coronavirus response. We are confident that this health crisis will be overcome through rapid medical development including test kits, therapeutics and vaccines. In addition, Congress will hopefully allot a substantial increase to the budget for health equipment and supplies so we are not caught flatfooted when a future epidemic occurs. On this issue, we believe the long-term future is bright. However, the short-to-intermediate term is a bit cloudy, until effective therapies and a vaccine are available.

Because of the near-term uncertainties, we believe a heightened level of caution is warranted. For the most part, we will be highly selective with the timing of new investments, whether it is deploying new cash or swapping one security for another. As stated earlier, when uncertainty is high, market volatility is generally also elevated. We hope to take advantage of future pullbacks to invest cash or to make portfolio changes. However, until the clouds lift and we can better understand the recovery path for economic activity, we expect to be more patient in committing new capital or making material changes to our strategy.

In terms of strategy, it is important to adhere to a well-defined financial plan. This includes

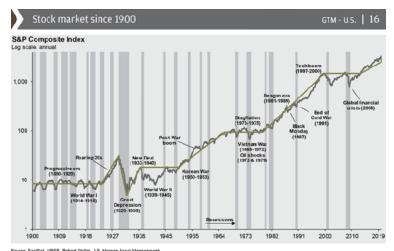
confirming that you have access to an adequate cash reserve until this crisis passes and markets rebound. If not, raise capital when asset prices rally. It is also smart to stick to a diversified portfolio of U.S. and foreign stocks, high grade and high yield bonds and REITs and high yield MLPs in whatever allocation best fits your investment objectives. Your Covenant financial advisor is monitoring your portfolio to assure these core principles are in place. We are always available to assess and review your plan by audio or video call.

Especially during this period, we are grateful for your business and the trust you have placed in us to advise and manage your financial affairs. We hope and pray for your continued health and safety amid this trying time.



Rather than write extensively about equity valuations, economic statistics and investing principles, we offer the following charts organized by topic and courtesy of J.P. Morgan Asset Management:

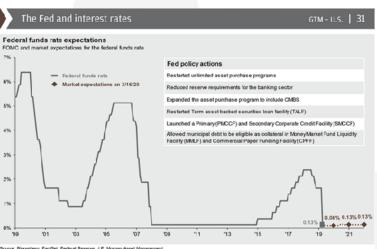
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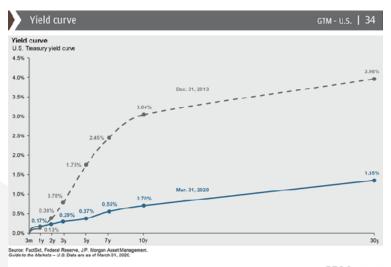
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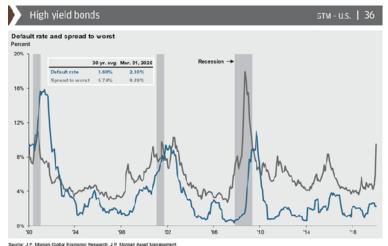
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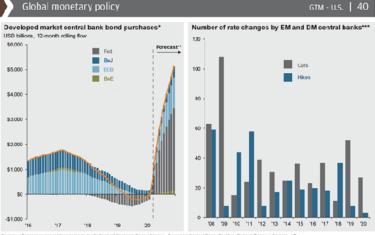


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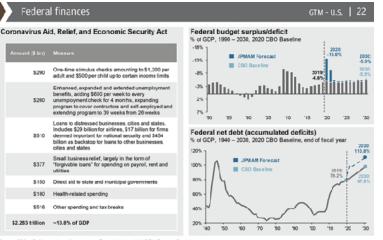
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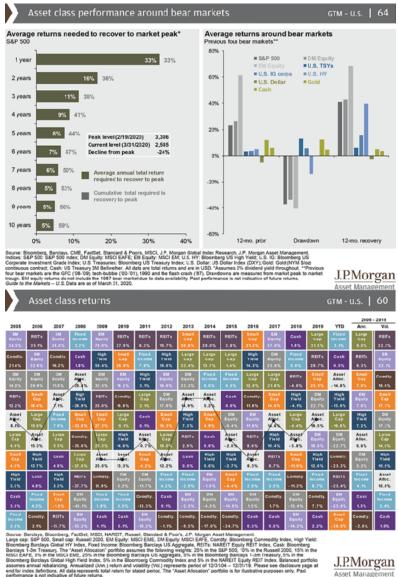
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\*Any performance-related data listed in this report may



represent un-audited results compiled by Covenant Asset Management or others. It could be intended to reflect results that are indicative of Covenant's individual client's equity performance who religiously invest according to our model portfolios. This performance data represents past performance and individual client results may vary materially. Past performance does not guarantee

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