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## SENIOR SOLUTIONS UPDATE

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**SUBJECT:** INVESTMENT COMMENTARY  
**DATE:** MAY 25, 2023



### Quarter in Review

*Last year had the worst financial market performance for most of the developed markets last 75 years.*

King Charles III was crowned as the new monarch of the United Kingdom in May. He was wearing the St. Edward Crown, weighing nearly five pounds and valued at nearly GBP45 million. Made of two kilograms of solid gold, it is adorned with more than 400 gemstones including six sapphires and 12 rubies. There are an increasing number of wealthy people in the world. Richemont, the Swiss luxury goods maker that owns the Cartier brand, reported strong quarterly results. Tapestry was the best-performing S&P Global Luxury stock.

While Global luxury home prices, according to real estate tracker Knight Frank, have turned negative for the first time since 2009, they are likely to face continued downward pressure in the coming quarters as rates are expected to continue rising especially overseas. Global housing markets are retreating after years of steady gains. There are widespread declines in inflation-adjusted housing prices for two-thirds of the countries within recent data from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). This is the response that housing markets are having to rising interest rates in an effort to contain inflation.

The US Federal Reserve (Fed) raised its benchmark federal-funds rate twice in 1Q23, by only 25 basis points each time. The rate range is currently 5.00%-5.25%, its highest since 2007. The 2023 market rate expectations shifted dramatically last quarter. For 2023, markets shifted from pricing in three hikes and one cut, to three cuts. Taking the current rate minus the inflation rate, what is known as the 'real rate', is in positive territory for the first time since May 2020. Global consumers are resilient, as real income growth turns positive once more. However, the widening difference between the Fed projections and market expectations means more uncertainty. The banking crisis derailed expectations for policy and hinders the credit markets for lending.



The sharp Fed's rate hikes placed new pressures on the financial system. The March collapses of Silicon Valley (SVB) and Signature Banks were the first major breakdown. The record amount of commercial mortgages expiring in 2023 will further test the financial health of small and regional banks. According to data

firm Trepp Inc, smaller banks hold around \$2.3 trillion in commercial real estate debt. That is almost 80% of commercial mortgages held by all banks as reported in the WSJ article Commercial Property Debt Creates More Bank Worries. Large number of office defaults could force banks to mark down value of these and other loans, resulting in a failure to meet statutory liquidity ratios.

More than \$17 billion of Credit Suisse (CS) additional Tier 1 bonds will be written down as part of the bank's acquisition by UBS, according to the Swiss Financial Market Supervisory Authority. That crisis sparked a sell-off in the \$254 billion of CS bonds. ECB Supervisory Board requires more visibility into bank deposits flows. All banks engage in “maturity transformation,” making short-term deposits against long-term investments. CS and SVB had invested their reserves into long-term bonds. This is risky when yield curves change dramatically. After the crises, institutional and retail investors are bearish on the banking sector.

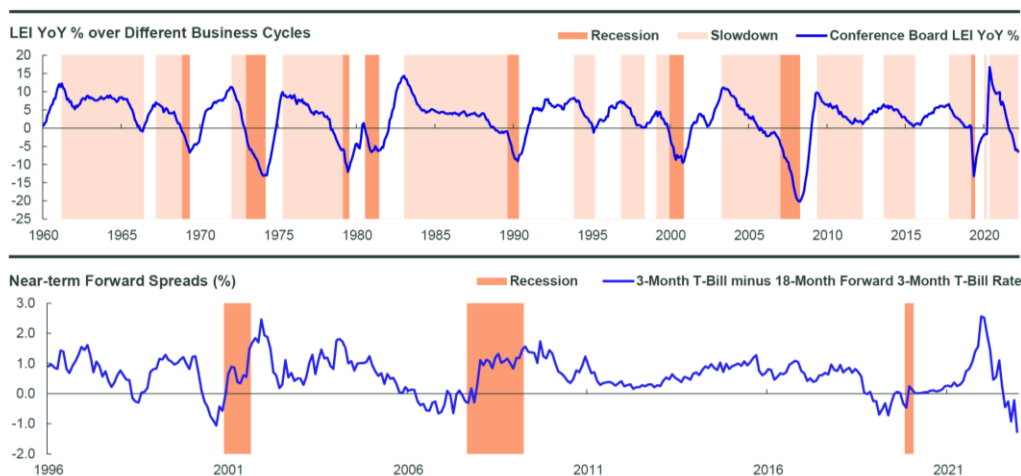
The global financial system is showing considerable strains uninsured depositors extract deposits at record speed. The banking turmoil will slow lending by banks to support the economy. Real estate funds have seen large declines. Debt vulnerabilities of sovereign government bonds depress lower-rated emerging market debt. Increased financial insecurity according to the IMF, could result in a 4-8% decline in GDP. “Reducing debt vulnerabilities and rebuilding fiscal buffers over time is an overriding priority.”

Over 2/3 of remaining global trade is still invoiced in USD. Global Asset Managers, Central Banks, and International Agencies use the USD as the accounting unit. The world economy needs financial liquidity for growth. In part this is created by the US running trade and current account deficits. Over the last 20 years, the US has run an *average* current account deficit is nearly \$1 trillion. The historically massive inflows of capital in the last decade funded those twin deficits, which *averaged* over 5% of GDP, with the balance sheet at negative 75% of GDP or \$17 trillion. Most of the deficit is due to the Net International Investment Position (NIIP). Such an indebted situation could threaten the standing of USD as the primary reserve currency. Some 65+ countries peg their currencies to USD and 85% of foreign currency (FX) trades are in USD.

All eyes have shifted to the debate about the increase in the US debt ceiling. The national debt currently stands at \$31.7 trillion, or 120% of U.S. gross domestic product (GDP). The US Congress must compromise spending on needed programs against the rising debt. The Treasury General Account is down to its last \$85 billion. IRS taxes receipts along with recent US debt issuances drain liquidity from the markets. Market funds reached almost \$5.3 trillion as of April 13. The money market accounts funnel into the Fed's ‘reverse repo’ facility that has reached \$2.3 trillion. Lows in the reserve balance might lead to a new low in the S&P 500.

## Business Cycle Trends

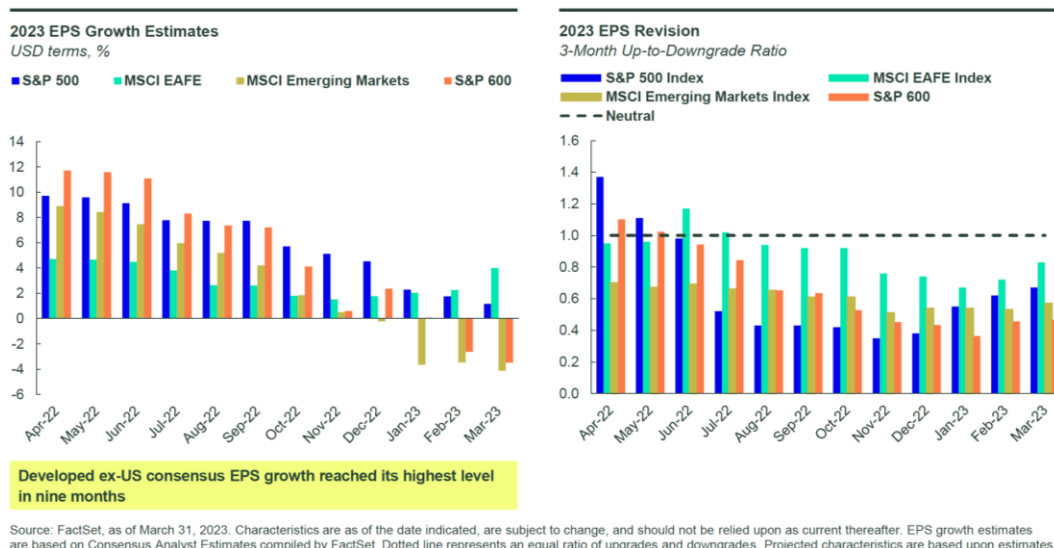
Despite improvement in economic sentiment in the US, leading economic indicators continue rolling over, suggesting further headwinds



The Sentix Investor Confidence, a monthly gauge of current business conditions in the 17 eurozone countries, declined to -13.1 in May from -8.7 in April. The index measuring the current situation in the eurozone also dipped to -9.0 in May from -2.3 in April, sparking discussions about a possible recession. There is a growing expectation that the People's Bank of China may lower policy lending rates to stimulate growth in the world's second-largest economy.

The potential for the current inflationary and monetary conditions to be more structural than cyclical is a key risk. For this quarter, those risks include inflation; the cost of capital, debt, and financial instability; geopolitics, governance, and policy risks; China's macro environment; and the global climate transition.

### Earnings sentiment in the developed ex-US region improved further, while the outlook for emerging markets and US small caps remains negative



## Market Overview

*The US debt-ceiling impasse and increased US-China polarization are key risks to the market recovery.*

Nuveen expects risk assets to undergo a period of heightened volatility amid a flurry of headlines on progress. Intermediate and longer-duration securities would be expected to outperform their shorter-duration counterparts. Additionally, short-term Treasuries are favored over core bonds, as they tend to outperform immediately after a pause in a Fed's tightening cycle.

The 2023 core inflation is expected slow to 5.1% this year. That is above target, with upward revision for the last two quarters. Nominal wage gains continue to lag price increases impacting profits, while 'real wages' after inflation are still positive. Labor demand remains strong, as firms struggle to fill vacancies from a continuing weak labor supply.

Initial jobless claims in the U.S. rose to 264,000, higher than the consensus estimate of 245,000. Yet, the US labor market remains relatively strong. This increase in initial jobless claims may prompt a pause in rate hikes by the Fed. The US Federal Reserve's new economic projections reflect expectations of a sharp drop in economic activity for the rest of this year. Fed officials expect US GDP only to be 0.4% in all of 2023.

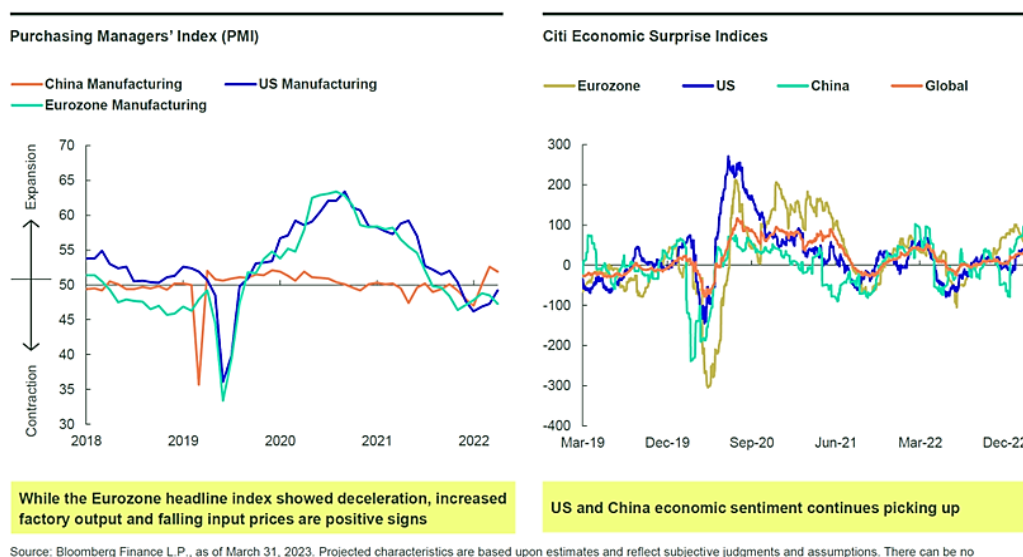
The International Monetary Funds (IMF) reported *5 year global growth* at about 3%. Global growth collapsed in 2022, falling from 6.1% to 3.4% in 2023. The latest IMF World Economic Outlook has growth bottoming at 2.8% this year, before rising modestly to 3% next year, the lowest medium-term growth forecast since 1990.

The outlook had dropped 0.1% points from January projections. The economic slowdown is most pronounced in advanced economies. Global inflation is also expected to fall albeit more slowly, from 8.7% in 2022, to 7% in 2023, then to 4.9% in 2024.

Slow economic growth remains endemic in the Euro area and the UK, where growth is expected to fall to 0.8% and -0.3% this year respectively, rebounding to 1.4% and 1% next year. IMF predicts that many as 90% of advanced economies will likely experience a decline in the growth rate this year. There is momentum in developing nations such as China and India. Many Emerging Markets(EM) and Developing economies are on the upswing, with 2023 growth accelerating to 4.5% in 2023 from 2.8% in 2022.

The UK's Office for Budget Responsibility forecasts their economy will grow by 5% *over 3 years* between 2022 and 2025. That is £112 billion more than the Bank of England's (BoE) expectation of no growth. The BoE imposed a 12th consecutive interest-rate increase of 25 basis points to 4.5%, as inflation remained above target through to 2025. The European Central Bank (ECB) raised its benchmark rate another 25 basis points to 3.25% in May. That is the second in 2023 for the ECB and the highest point since November 2008.

**Eurozone and US manufacturing activities have stabilized but remain in contraction. On the other hand, economic sentiment in Eurozone has cooled lately**



Corporate profits will be most impacted by the economic decline, leading more companies to consider layoffs as their stocks struggle. In recent years, corporate margins had surged with steeply higher prices and only modestly higher wages. Now corporations are likely to absorb much of the rising labor costs. Industries, such as semiconductors and software maybe less squeezed as the demand will remain high and they operate with tight margins.

Earnings estimates still look too optimistic and equity valuations are too stretched for a soft landing. The earnings outlook seems disconnected from this negative macroeconomic backdrop. The overall earnings per share (EPS) trajectory is still well above its pre-pandemic trend, implying a growth rate of 0.8% for 2023 and 12.5% for 2024.

During the seven economic recessions since 1963, the S&P 500 had a lesser than 10% decline in earnings once in 1980. S&P 500 earnings declined an average of 16.8% in economic recessions. The consensus economic forecast is for a recession, but earnings forecasts have not incorporated that expectation. The bond market is signaling danger. The yield curve and the Fed funds forward rates are predicting six or seven rate cuts in the next two years. These are mixed signals.

Morningstar reported that after a brutal 2022, stocks and bonds posted gains during the first quarter. The start of the year also saw a divergence between the stock and bond markets when it came to signals about the economic outlook. The valuation premium of US equities to the rest of the world has shrunk. Equity flows data suggest investors are eyeing bargains in the Eurozone, Japan and EM, while decreasing allocations to the US. Total US based companies' value as a percentage of the global markets is at its highest level ever, climbing from 40% to 60+% over the last two decades (2000-2020), despite the ascendancy of China. Investors are betting on the US with company valuations backed by future earnings and growth prospects.

Still-high valuations, coupled with the deteriorating earnings outlook, point to potential downside risk for equities. Downgrades to forward EPS estimates now outnumber upgrades for both US Large and Small Cap indices. Equity markets are pricing more benign economic conditions than the bond market participants.



To reach balance, equities would have to fall further or bond prices to move higher or lower yields. That suggests downside risk for equities. Historical precedent and cross-asset comparisons indicate that equity valuations are more likely to contract than expand, according to FT Russell data as of February 28<sup>th</sup>.

## Equity Markets

*The S&P 500 companies in aggregate are expected to post the largest earnings decline since Q2 2020.*

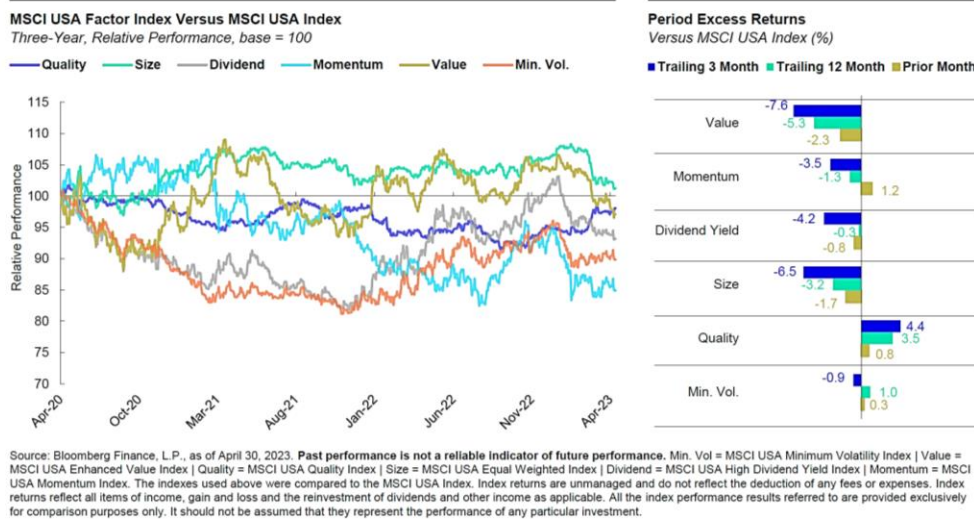
US leading economic indicators suggest headwinds. Despite the regional bank crisis and increasing recession risk, equity risk premia remain well below its long-term average. Historically, low equity risk premia does not support long term equity returns. It indicates expensive valuations especially relative to bonds. The positive correlation between equities and bonds prices finally decoupled in March following the regional bank crisis.

Quality was the only factor outperforming the broad market in Developed regions in 1Q23, while Value was the worst performing factor as investors pursue high quality names in expectations of tighter financial conditions. Whereas the Growth factor earnings outlook is stronger than the Value factor, the price is higher for the same level of growth. Quality outperformed amid heightened volatility reported State Street Global Advisors (SSGA) the parent of the SPDR ETFs.



# US Factor Trends

Quality continues leading sector performance, while Value remains at the bottom, as investors favor quality names given weakening economic prospects



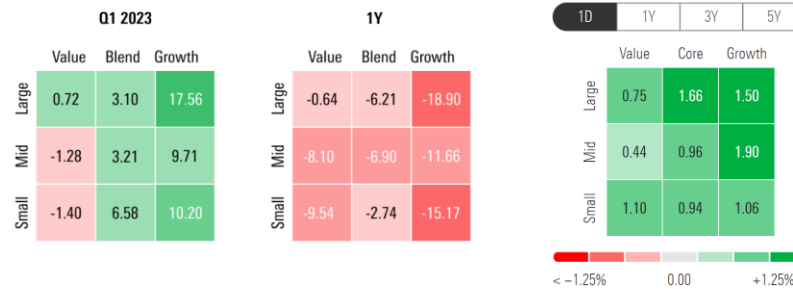
The Morningstar US Market Index gained 7.4% in 1Q23. Stocks are up 12.5% from the Oct. 14 low but still down 13.5% from their last high on Jan. 3, 2022. During 1Q23, stocks continued in a trading range since October 2022. Despite disruptions in the banking sector, the S&P 500 rose by 3.7% in March. Growth stocks had a relief rally in face of a cessation of rate hikes. The Developed ex-US index is showing signs of life. While Emerging Markets outperformed most Fixed Income categories, except 10yr + Treasury Bond index.

	Performance (%)		
	Q1 2023	Q4 2022	1 Year
<b>U.S. Equities</b>			
U.S. Market	7.40	7.26	-8.60
Value	0.18	14.68	-2.82
Growth	14.79	0.15	-17.46
Dividend Composite	0.55	13.69	-2.47
Wide Moat Composite	9.34	8.26	-8.31
<b>Global Equities</b>			
Developed Markets ex-US	7.53	16.24	-3.38
Emerging Markets	3.58	9.39	-9.66
<b>Fixed Income</b>			
U.S. Core Bond	2.92	1.85	-4.73
U.S. Treasury Bond	2.97	0.73	-4.59
U.S. High Yield Bond	3.68	4.07	-3.44
TIPS	3.38	2.04	-6.59
10+ Year Treasury Bond	6.18	-0.62	-16.30

Source: Morningstar Direct, Morningstar Indexes. Data as of March 31, 2023.

There is earnings resilience for Large Cap companies. The more domestic-oriented advantage of Small Caps amid a soaring US dollar had given Small Caps the lead since Q4 2022. In recent months, small caps have reclaimed the edge over large caps, Global small caps appear undervalued and are beneficiaries of easing inflationary pressures. They are typically among the earliest areas of the stock market to recover from an economic downturn. More than two thirds of smallcap managers across different styles outperformed, while growth managers overall have seen better success than in 2022. The S&P MidCap 400 Index and S&P SmallCap 600 Index have positive valuations and prospects.

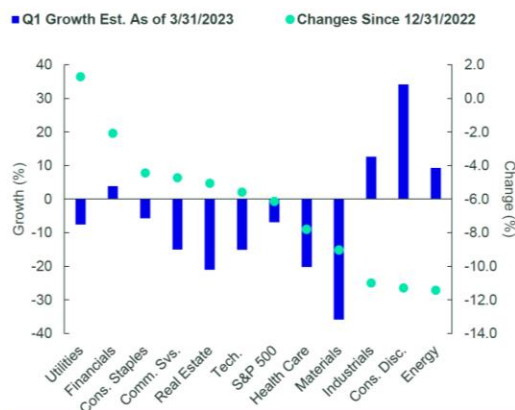
## U.S. Equity Style Box Performance



Source: Morningstar Direct, Morningstar Indexes. Data as of March 31, 2023.

Among top performing Sectors in 2023 so far are high-tech and high-growth indexes. The Morningstar US Semiconductors Index rose 39.2%. Tech and Communication Services names contributed to 60% of the outperformance in 1Q23. Materials and Real Estate have good valuations, but negative earnings sentiment. Consumer Staples, Industrials, and Technology have shown strong earnings sentiment, but valuations of the latter two are stretched. Consumer Staples is a defensive sector with attractive valuations. Homebuilders is a downtrodden cyclical industry but with stabilizing fundamentals.

### S&P 500 Sector Q1 EPS Growth



The S&P 500 is expected to post its largest earnings decline since Q2 2020

Source: FactSet, as of 03/31/2023. The above targets are estimates based on certain assumptions and analysis made by FactSet. There is no guarantee that the estimates will be achieved.

### S&P 500 Sector 2023 EPS Revisions

Sector	1-Month Change to 2023 EPS Est.	3-Month Changes to 2023 EPS Est.	1-Month Up-to-Downgrade Ratio	3-Month Up-to-Downgrade Ratio
Communication Services	0.7	0.65	0.45	0.33
Consumer Discretionary	-0.4	-7.28	1.24	0.77
Consumer Staples	0.1	-0.11	1.42	0.54
Energy	-1.8	-6.52	0.29	0.35
Financials	-0.8	-2.98	0.36	0.76
Health Care	0.0	-4.99	1.21	0.91
Industrials	0.2	-2.67	1.17	1.12
Information Technology	-0.1	-3.72	1.35	0.78
Materials	0.8	-4.65	0.77	0.26
Real Estate	-0.5	-3.63	0.41	0.38
Utilities	-0.5	-1.47	0.62	0.50
S&P 500	-0.3	-3.57	0.81	0.67

Industrials' earnings sentiment has held up well recently

US stock performance was hindered by lagging returns in Pharmaceutical & Biotechnology, with declines in Retailers and Oil & Gas stocks. Those were offset by the stronger returns in US Autos and a significant gain in Tech. Tech sentiment remains strong with upgrades outpacing downgrades. Tech and Industrials are expensive to their trading histories. While Real Estate and Energy are attractively valued based on most metrics. The Material sector valuation is better than the S&P 500 and versus its own trading history. The 'bond-proxy' high-income sectors of Utilities and Real Estate have deteriorated in value. Cyclical sectors like Industrials and Materials have strong momentum. Real Estate sentiment cooled significantly from the previous month because of poor earnings surprises and no upgrades. Industrial earnings sentiment is up.

## Morningstar Sector Indexes

	Performance (%)		
	Q1 2023	Q4 2022	1 Year
<b>Cyclical</b>			
Basic Materials	5.11	15.97	-5.67
Consumer Cyclical	16.14	-6.52	-16.17
Financial Services	-3.52	12.71	-12.80
Real Estate	1.23	4.62	-19.63

## Sensitive

Communication Services	19.84	-1.35	-19.40
Energy	-4.99	21.00	11.51
Industrials	4.20	16.84	-0.42
Technology	22.51	3.91	-7.17

## Defensive

Consumer Defensive	1.51	11.79	0.17
Healthcare	-3.75	11.85	-4.90
Utilities	-3.04	8.88	-5.66

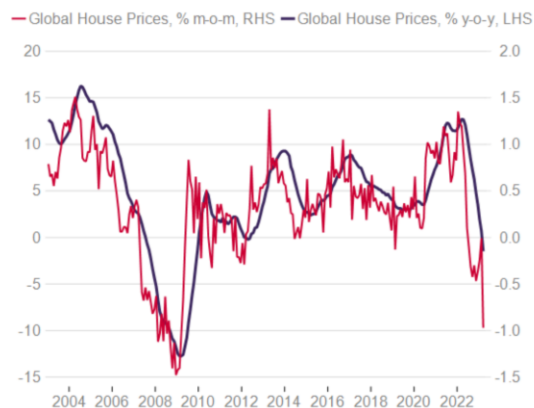
Source: Morningstar Direct, Morningstar Indexes. Data as of March 31, 2023.

Technology and Consumer Discretionary sectors led inflows last month. And Health Care had its third straight month of outflows over \$1 billion, reversing the strong inflows from last year. Energy has strong long-term momentum and valuation score is positive, but earnings sentiment is negative. Cyclical earnings sentiment is down, as risks of recessionary and recent bank failure depressed the earnings outlook in Energy and Financials. The US Banks-Regional Index fell the hardest of all US stock indexes. Real Estate Investment Trusts (REIT) were hit by financial turmoil. While the banking crisis appears to be contained, short interest in the Financial sector jumped over the past month.

Last year's aggressive Fed rate hike sent Homebuilder stocks trumpling. With housing prices cooling and mortgage rates trending lower, recently the industry has shown signs of stabilization. February existing home sales beat expectations, increasing by 14.5% the largest monthly gain since July 2020. Strong labor markets and household balance sheets may improve homebuyer confidence when mortgage rates stabilize at a lower level. Strong Q4 earnings and sales surprises for Homebuilders came with the possibility of lower mortgage rates. Homebuilders are currently trading below their tangible book value, the lowest level since 2008.

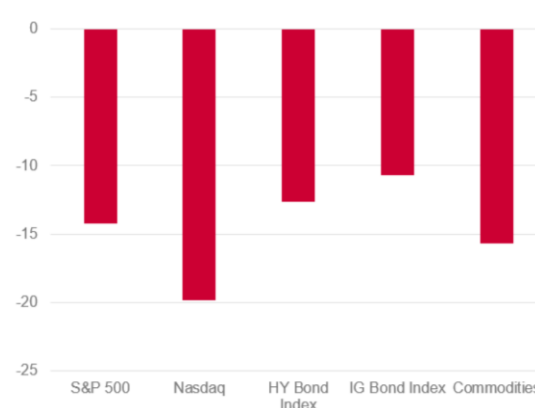
## Global Home Prices Are Falling

Global - Index Of Global House Prices



## Despite Rally Since October, Assets Are Still Down Y-o-Y

US - 12-Month Change In Asset Prices, %



Business leaders have not targeted cybersecurity for cost cuts, due to the significance of cyberthreats. Cyber and information security is the top area of increased investment for 2023, more than data analytics, cloud platforms, and artificial intelligence. Spending on information security products and services is projected to be more than \$188 billion in 2023, with 11.3% growth. President Biden's 2024 budget proposal allocates approximately \$26 billion to implement the new national cybersecurity strategy.

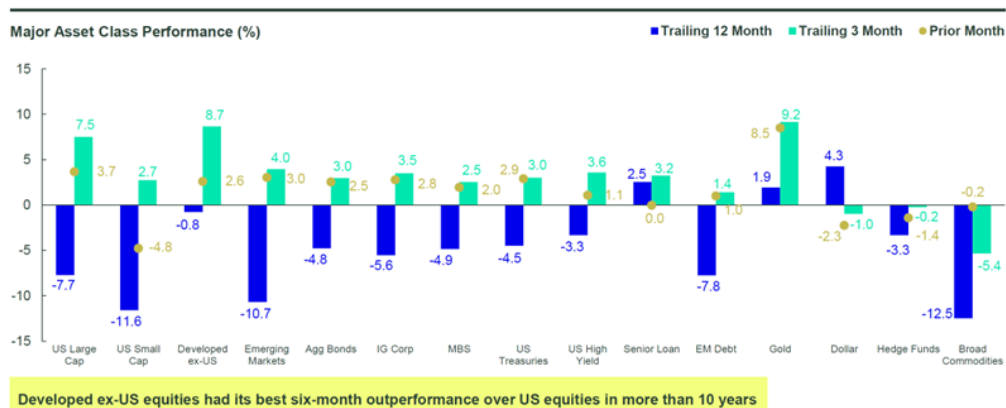
Over the past year, the Infrastructure sector outperformed Real Estate. Infrastructure offers earnings yields similar to those of Fixed Income. Infrastructure investments such as regulated utilities can pass on the higher costs. Infrastructure is a sector that can be resilient in slowing economic environment. Also Health Care, Software, and Insurance brokers that are well positioned to withstand economic downturns.



The current the combined value of US based companies as a percentage of the global markets went from 40% to 60+% over the last two decades and is at its highest level ever, despite the ascendancy of China. This indicates investors are betting on US prosperity. The value is backed by future earnings and growth prospects.

## Asset Class Performance

Despite the recent bank turmoil, global equities registered positive returns in March, while most bond categories gained on expectations of lower rates



## Developed xUS Equities

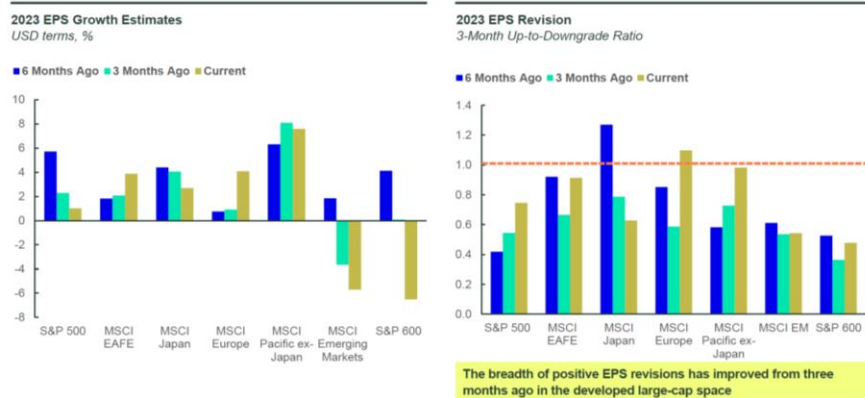
*Europe and Japan are tilted to Financials and Industrials positioned to benefit from Global Growth.*

Equities in the UK, Europe, and Japan ended modestly higher in local currency terms, while developed peers in Asia Pacific and the US finished lower. European investors' confidence continues improving. Developed Europe and Japan are tilted to Financials and Industrials, having the highest beta to global growth.

Broad developed exUS regions are attracting strong inflows, while regional and single country funds posted outflows. Eurozone manufacturing activities have stabilized but remain in contraction, while economic sentiment in Eurozone has cooled. Despite strong performance, stocks in developed exUS are undervalued. But European, Germany, and France markets have positive momentum.

## Global Earnings

Europe outpaced other segments in terms of the magnitude and breadth of EPS revisions, while emerging markets and US small caps' outlook remains negative



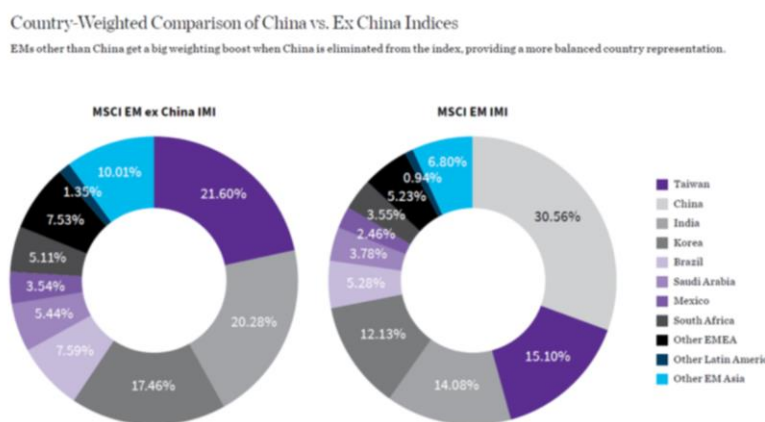
IDSA reports that major asset managers are buying European corporate bonds, which they think is less risky than US corporate debt, due to the turmoil in regional banking and the ongoing debate over raising the federal debt limit.

## Emerging Markets

*The Emerging Markets suffered greater losses than Developing markets.*

The Emerging Markets suffered greater losses than Developing markets as many of largest constituents gave back recent gains, with China, Brazil and India down 10%, 6.9% and 3.8%, respectively. Brazil and India are perceived as moving negative. Market equities leadership reshuffled across regions mid-quarter in February. UK, Europe, and Japan extended their twelve months outperformance versus the FTSE All-World index. While the downturn in Asia Pacific reversed that region's advances over the last six months. The Russian economy is entering a long-term regression, according to former Russian Central Bank official Alexandra Prokopenko.

The critical mass of the MSCI EM Index has doubled over the past five years. Investors are more positive toward emerging markets debt as the regional economic stability increases. Both emerging markets equity and debt investments offer more attractive valuations than they did a few months ago. With the US dollar rally weakening it is less of a headwind other countries. A key catalyst for this change is a better environment in China. There is good relative value for Mexico, Brazil and Indonesia securities.



Sources: MSCI and William Blair, as of December 2022.

An EM ex China Growth strategy has potential other regions, across sectors, and market capitalizations. Regions include Asia; Emerging Europe, Middle East and Africa (EMEA); and Latin America. While incredibly, China's weighting within the MSCI EM Index has increased from nearly nothing in 2000 to 35% in 2022. Currently, China's share of world GDP is 19% and its share of listed market cap is 14%. These numbers are expected to rise to 20% of global GDP and market valuation.

EMs have much more technology, particularly Semiconductor and broad Hardware, as well as Materials and Financials, and a higher weighting in Commodities. EMs have less weight in Consumer Discretionary and Communications Services. The EM key drivers are in the Growth sectors, such as IT with increased income growth from a surge in innovative and digitally enabled business models in e-commerce.

## Fixed Income Market

*2022 was one of the worst years in history for bonds.*

The bond market finished the 1Q23 back in positive territory as bonds of nearly all kinds posted positive returns. The Morningstar US Core Bond Index rose 2.9%, with other bond sectors gained over 3%. Volatility

in the bond market remains at twice its long-term levels for the fourth quarter in a row. Bond investors are paring back their exposure to US Treasuries due to the legislative impasse over raising the federal debt limit according to ISMA.

Morningstar Bond Indexes			
	Performance (%)		
	Q1 2023	Q4 2022	1 Year
Core Bond	2.92	1.85	-4.73
Sector			
U.S. Treasuries	2.97	0.73	-4.59
Corporate	3.61	3.72	-5.20
High Yield	3.68	4.07	-3.44
Mortgage	2.48	2.04	-4.98
Municipal	2.88	4.08	-0.36
Inflation-Protected			
TIPS	3.38	2.04	-6.59
Floating Rate			
Leveraged Loans	3.23	2.62	2.54
Source: Morningstar Direct, Morningstar Indexes. Data as of March 31, 2023.			

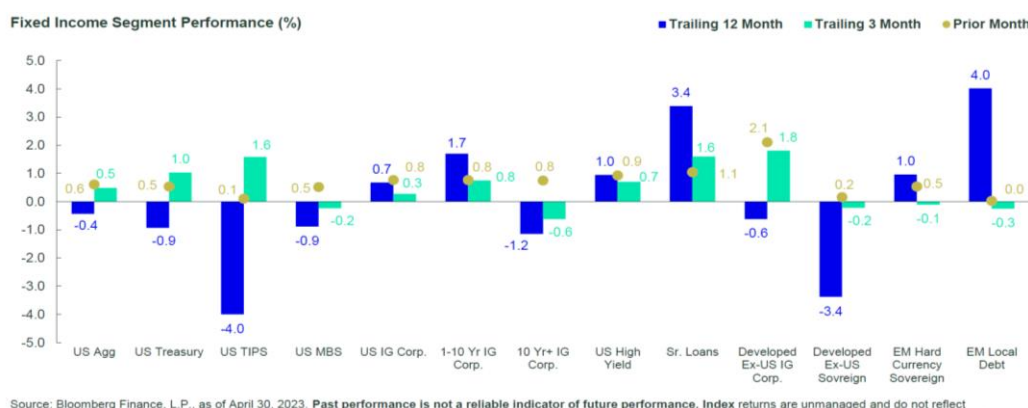
Maturity			
Short-Term Core	1.80	1.19	-0.44
Intermediate Core	2.80	2.10	-4.75
Long-Term Core	5.80	2.67	-13.64
Inflation-Protected			
TIPS	3.38	2.04	-6.59
U.S. Government			
Short-Term Treasury	1.82	0.95	-0.41
Intermediate Treasury	3.18	1.20	-4.12
Long-Term Treasury	6.18	-0.62	-16.30
Floating Rate			
Leveraged Loans	3.23	2.62	2.54
Source: Morningstar Direct, Morningstar Indexes. Data as of March 31, 2023.			

Following a peak on March 8<sup>th</sup>, bonds had the steepest three-day decline in the 2-year Treasury yield since the stock market crash of 1987. Yields of all maturities have fallen this year with prices rising on expectations of weaker economic growth and an end to the Fed's rate hikes. However, the yield curve remains inverted.

The Morningstar US Long-Term Bond Indexes were the 1Q23 top performers. Bond prices continued to post wide swings during the first quarter, while volatility eased among stocks. Bond yields have been falling fast recently, highlighting concerns about the potential for a recession. While Long Term Bond yields have not held above 4%, due to macro economic indicators, the yield curve beyond the one-year has steepened from tightening credit conditions and recessionary risks in the prospect of rate cuts later this year.

The rate spread between the 2-year and 10-year narrowed in March, as investors changed expectation for the Fed rate path. The rate spread for High Yield (HY) bonds remain below the level at the beginning of the year, which makes the price at risk for when spreads widen and prices fall.

Corporate bonds are pricing neutral credit conditions this year, despite the likelihood of less lending due to the outlook for weaker global growth. Investment Grade (IG) corporate credit spreads have been tightening as compared to risk free Treasuries. In historical terms, IG and HY Euro bonds are currently the most attractively valued Bond segments, although could decline if spreads widen when their yields increase.



Long maturity and high quality bonds led the bond rally in March, reversing the trend in the first two months of this year. Ultra Short Government has the highest yield per unit of duration which had driven performance when rates were hiked and can protect the value if rates moderate. Higher quality bonds segments amongst the Corporate Credit Bonds and Preferred securities are favored.

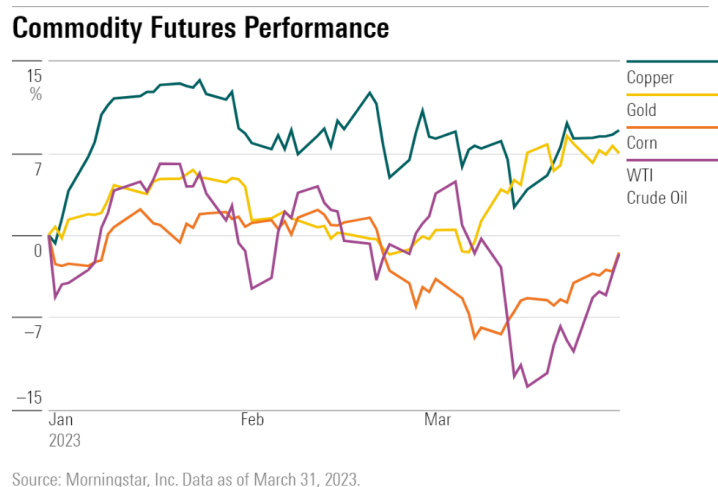
## Other Assets

*Gold posted its best start to the year since 2015 due to turmoil in the Financial markets.*

Commodities have low correlation to equities and provide portfolio diversification benefits even in low-return periods. Commodity prices have fluctuated greatly over the past three months, with copper and gold rising and oil falling. Losses in real estate were particularly acute in countries with the highest inflation, such as the UK and Developed Europe. Real estate only outperformed equities in the low-inflation markets such as Developed Asia Pacific ex Japan.

The Standard & Poors (S&P) Goldman Sachs Commodity Index (GSCI) for Agriculture was the down 2.9% in April, with Grains down 6.9%. Strong crop growth and waning demand depressed corn, soy, and wheat according to SSGA. Private exporters recently cancelled hundreds of thousands of bushel of corn, according to the Department of Agriculture. The massive and less expensive Brazil corn crop also weighed on US grain prices. Sugar however rose 22% to a new 10 year high. Gold neared its peak with global uncertainty about the USD safe-haven position.

Energy is half of the commodity index with no price movement in April. Oil prices ended the first quarter at \$75.67 per barrel. Energy is the most sensitive commodity to inflation. The new GSCI Climate Aware incorporates environmental concerns and has only a third of its allocation to energy commodities. The waning influence of the USD is pushing Gold to near high prices.



Gold posted its best start to the year since 2015, it gained rose 5.72% so far. Central banks were responsible for much of the growth, adding a massive 1,136 metric tons, which is the largest annual amount since 1967. China began accumulating gold in 2022 for the first time in three years as part of diversifying away from the dollar. Western investors purchased the most since 2011, some 427 tons or 15 million ounces. The World Gold Council (WGC) indicates that ETFs that hold physical gold will overtake the demand from bars and coins this year. U.S. Global has a Gold ETF (GOLD) and Precious Metal Miners ETF (GOAU).

The SSGA Gold Index crossed a strong technical signal in 1Q23, the golden cross of moving averages. The direction of general Commodities price gave mixed signals about the economy to investors this year. Copper prices rose 9% during the first quarter. Copper is seen as a bellwether for the global economy. Materials are favorable as both put/call volume ratio and short interest are very low which minimizes downward pressure.

Real estate is commonly considered an inflation hedge, but only true during periods of low to medium inflation. KPMG sees existing home sales sinking to 3.9 million in 2023, down 23% from 2022. That would match 2007 drop during the Great Recession. The Earnings yields (E/P is the reverse of P/E) of listed real estate are now almost equal to that of equities, which favors real estate debt over equity. Property-level fundamentals remain strong within the areas of housing, industrial, and alternatives.

Specialized medical offices are the favored RE investment in the US. In European, it is suburban rental housing in areas enjoying growing industrialization. For Asia Nuveen prefers investments in Tokyo senior living facilities. And in Australian it is student housing. Real Assets such as defensive regulated utilities and waste management companies, as well as clean energy, renewable fuel sources, and global demand for protein are investments that align with climate transition. Public RE projects focus on industrial spaces, strip retail, and select 'net lease' arrangements. The office sector continues to struggle according to Nuveen.

Inventory of oil reserves are at a four-decade low. These will be restocked to strengthen national and economic security. The US administration aims to purchase oil once prices reach around \$70 a barrel. The OPEC cartel surprise production cut of 1.66 million barrels on Apr 3<sup>rd</sup> pushed oil prices back above \$80 reported OilPrice.com. The International Energy Agency warns of a significant supply deficit later this year US CPI figures coming in at 5.6% also nudged Brent above \$87 per barrel. Fatih Birol of the IEA said that oil markets could see tightness in the second half of 2023 should voluntary production cuts of key OPEC+ producers stay in place.

The Chinese government is expecting peak energy demand in the Summer to exceed 1.36 Trillion Watts, prompting Beijing to expedite the approval of new coal mines and fast-track the construction of already approved ones to secure higher baseload capacity. China's Sinopec also bought a stake in the Qatari Megaproject. The US dollar (USD) is the basis for pricing oil and many other commodities.

After March 9, the USD fell on investor fears sparked by the collapse of Silicon Valley Bank. The Great Britian Pound (GBP) is on track for its fourth straight month of gains, according to a trade-weighted index by Bank of America. This would mark the currency's best-ever start to a year. Meanwhile, the Euro strengthened this quarter as the European Central Bank (ECB) raised interest rates.

Undervaluation of GBP and the the Japanese Yen has been reversing since 4Q22. However, both the GBP and the Yen remain undervalued. The USD strengthens in periods of high market stress. However, the US banking and fiscal crises are putting downward pressure on USD, which supports broader global economics and eases their financial conditions.

Leading cryptocurrencies posted gains in the 1Q23 as bitcoin (BTC) rose a stellar 67.1% and Ethereum (ETH) gained 47.2%. From year-ago levels, BTC is down 29.8% and ETH is down 35.8%. The US Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC) chair Rostin Behnam told a US House Appropriations Committee hearing that he views ETC as a commodity according to ISMD. That is in counter diction of the US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) brief that ETC is probably a security.

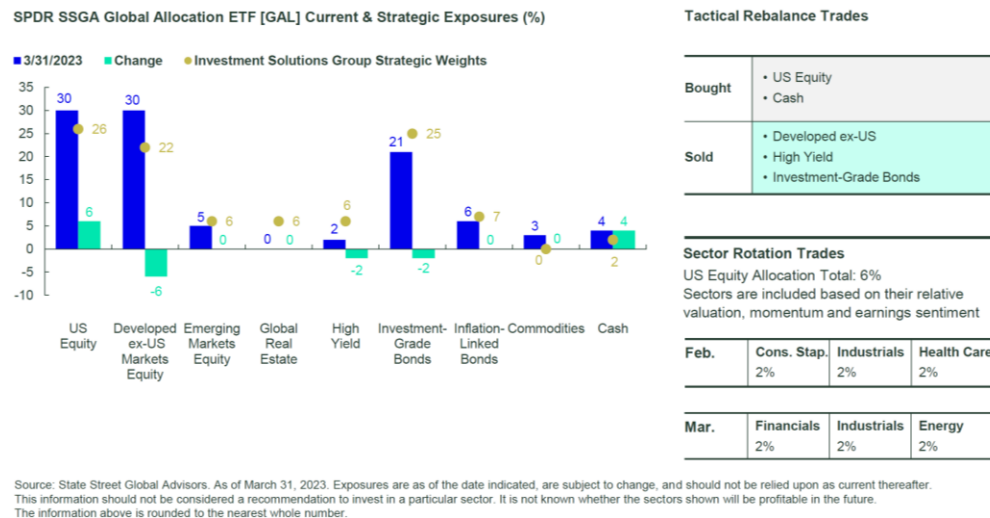
Disruption in the crypto space continued after the collapse of the crypto-exchange FTX, the shuttering of crypto-bank Silvergate Capital, and the bankruptcy-protection filing of cryptocurrency lender Genesis. As a relatively new sector, there is bound to be a period of challenges in this early phase of market acceptance. Dispite the volatility it is not a sector that can be disregarded.



## Asset Allocation

*The economic conditions are changing as the Central Banks are turning down the amount of stimulus.*

The above portfolio allocation profile is a good point of reference. A focus on US and non-US Europe, Asia, and Far East (EAFE) regions is the base at 50% of the portfolio. SSL supports a modicum to the Emerging Market equity and Global Real Estate, while not favor HY because of the default risk. Bonds have become more important because of a better income offer. High quality IG bonds are favored at 25% of the portfolio. Commodities and Real Assets are diversifiers and a source of gains. SSL has a higher allocation to the bucket.



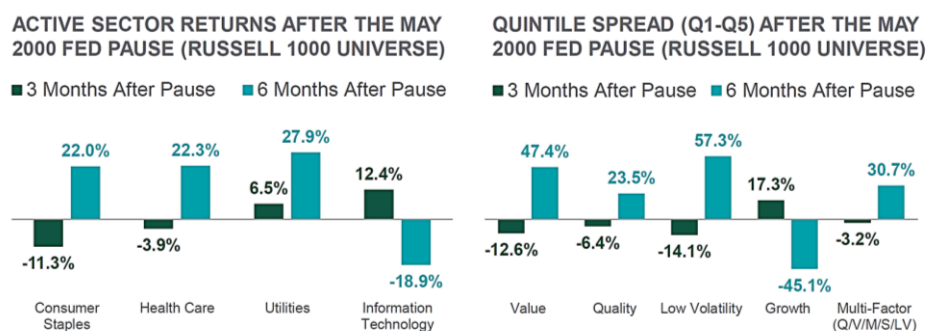
Stocks in Developed exUS countries are undervalued. But European, Germany, and France markets have positive momentum. And UK, Europe, and Japan extended their twelve months outperformance. European Corporate Bonds are attractive. Brazil and India regions are losing steam. There is good relative value for Mexico, Brazil and Indonesia securities. Overall, Asia Pacific has been losing momentum, but China is gaining.

Global Small Caps are beneficiaries of easing inflationary pressures yet appear undervalued. Small Caps have reclaimed an edge over large caps.

Consumer Staples is a defensive sector with attractive valuations. Homebuilders is downtrodden Cyclical industries have stabilizing fundamentals. Cyclical sectors such as Industrial and Materials have increased earnings and upgrades. Industrials are expensive. Consumer Staples remain solid. Energy and Financials are weakening. Health Care had its third straight month of outflows. Homebuilders are currently trading below their tangible book value. The Info Tech sector is improving. Spending on Information Security products and services is projected to be more than \$188 billion in 2023, with an 11.3% growth. The Infrastructure sector outperformed Real Estate.

Commodities remain important even though it does not need to serve as an inflation hedge. Agriculture was down 2.9%. Gold neared its peak. Energy is half of the commodity index with no price movement. Metals and Materials lead the commodity sector. Real Estate fundamentals remain strong within the areas of housing, industrial, and alternative. The USD has pulled-back.

As the Central Banks around the world reach their interest rate hiking cycle, the dynamics of financial markets will also pivot. Based on previous patterns, Utilities and Info Tech benefited shortly thereafter during the transition. Six months afterwards Utilities, Healthcare, and Consumer Staples gained 22%-27%. The more defensive Factors are positive after six months. Only Growth posted positive returns the first 3 months.



Source: Northern Trust, MSCI. From 05/31/2000 through 11/30/2000. Past performance is no guarantee of future results. Index performance returns do not reflect any

SSL uses a 'Smart Beta' strategy with factor, sector and regional screens to pinpoint the attractive securities within an index or to make an investable index. Academic and practitioner research have shown that Smart Beta portfolios outperform the overall benchmarks in the long run. High Quality Factor has the superior risk-adjusted returns. The strategies are implemented in the following SSL 2Q2023 Model Portfolio.

## Conclusion - THE INVESTMENT LANDSCAPE IS SHIFTING

Based on these insights, SSL is adjusting the model portfolio. The positioning focuses on Quality, Infrastructure, and Fixed Income. In Fixed Income, the Senior Loans SRLN were removed and added to the Variable Rate Preferred VRP. VRP is still Investment Grade and generating a healthy income. The Fixed Income allocation remains at 20%.

For Equities, there was an addition to US Small Cap Factor Fund to capture growth in that sector and to add a skew to Technology. The percentage to Financials was reduced to reflect the decline and difficulty in the sector, but not shares were sold. There was a small addition to Healthcare to keep the exposure on par with the percentage in the overall indexes. The equity allocation is heavily weighted to the US yet there are compelling values overseas. To capture that, additions were made to Europe Asia and the Far East (EAFE) Small Cap SCZ, International Quality Factor IQLT and Emerging Market Factor EMGF but non-US is still a small percentage.

For the Commodity and Real Asset space, the US Real Estate PSR was reduced due to potential impact from the troubles in the Financial Sector. The emphasis was switched to Commodities with added positions to the Enhanced Commodity ETF GCC which has more mineral and less energy exposure and to an ETF which captures investments in Global Water CGW initiatives. The Carbon ETN GRN remains at a slightly smaller percentage. Overall, there is a 10% allocation to Commodities.

The following page has the SSL 2Q23 Model Portfolio. An Morningstar Xray is attached with the email of this Investment Update. Specific analysis can be provided upon request. Please contact us to arrange an explanatory meeting.

**Previous performance is not a guarantee of future returns. All investments contain risk. Your particular portfolio should be designed to your level of risk and to target your financial goals. Review regularly.** Senior Solutions Ltd (SSL) provides financial planning guidance for a fee. The client receives guidance to implement at their own discretion. SSL does not guarantee any returns from such guidance. SSL is not an investment manager, does not sell investment or insurance products, nor receives any commission or third-party compensation. SSL does not directly manage or custody assets on behalf of clients. SSL is a financial planning firm for select clients.

Senior Solutions Ltd  
**2Q23 Portfolio Design Structure**  
*as of 30-May-23*

lio														
Green - Add Red - Remove ETFs														
20.00%	FIXED INCOME			Crd	Hldg	Hldg	Hldg	Hldg	Reg	Reg	Cap	Dur	YtdRet	Yld Str
0.00%	Cash													
7.00%	VNLA	Janus Henderson Short Duratio	A-	57%Cr	21%D	14%Cas	6%Gov	58%BBB	26%A	MidLtd	0.51	1.83%*	4.87%	4Neu
0.00%	SPIP	SPDR® Portfolio (3-5yr) TIPS ETF	AAA	100%Gov				100%AAA		HighMod	3.53	3.53%	6.32%	3Brz
0.00%	SRLN	SPDR® Blackstone Senior Loan	B+	93%Gov	7%Cash			61%B	25%BB	LowLtd	0.24	6.51%	6.25%	3Neu
7.00%	IUSB	iShares Core Total USD Bond	AA-	40%Gov	31%Cor	23%Sec	63%AAA	18%A	15%BBB	MidMod	6.02	3.27%	2.74%	3Gld
2.00%	VGIT	Vanguard Intmdt-Term Treas	AAA	99%Gov	.11%Cash			99%AAA		HighMod	5.18	2.94%	1.97%	4Slv
4.00%	VRP	Invesco Variable Rate Preferred	BBB-	100%Corp			63%BBB	31%BB	4%NR	MidLtd	3.05	0.4%	5.66%	5Brz
0.00%	CEMB	iShares JP Morgan EMB Corpor	BBB	92%Corp	7%Gov	.8%Cash	35%BBB	22%A	22%B	MidMod	4.15	2.58%	4.29%	4Slv
0.00%	CWB	SPDR® Blmbg Convert Secs		98%Util	2%ComS		80%NR	12%BBB		NA	2.21	4.58%	2.22%	4Brz
20.00%	Subtotal													
80.00%	EQUITY													
0.00%	MTUM	iShares MSCI USA Momentum F	B+	29%HC	15%Enr	10%CC	9%Ind	98%USA			LrgBld	-4.15%	2.14%	3Brz
10.00%	QUAL	iShares MSCI USA Quality Facto	B+	25%Tech	15%FS	14%HC	11%CSr	99%USA			LrgGrw	9.20%	1.43%	3Slv
5.00%	DEUS	Xtrackers Russell US Multifactor	B	17%Tech	12%FS	12%HC	11%CC	98%USA			MidVal	2.74%	1.72%	2Slv
6.00%	SMLF	iShares U.S. Small-Cap Eq Fac	B-	17%Tech	16%Ind	15%FS	13%CC	96%USA	2%Lat		SmlBld	3.58%	1.42%	4Gld
5.00%	XAR	SPDR® S&P Aerospace & Defens	B	96%Ind	4%Tech			99%USA			MidBld	6.35%	0.48%	4Slv
0.00%	XHB	SPDR® S&P Homebuilders ETF	B	52%CC	48%Ind			99%USA			MidVal	12.65%	0.94%	4Slv
3.00%	XLF	Financial Select Sector SPDR®	B	96%FS	3%Tech			97%USA	2%EU		LrgVal	-5.53%	2.11%	4Brz
6.00%	XLV	Health Care Select Sector SPDR®	A-	100%HC				99%USA			LrgBld	-4.34%	1.54%	5Slv
3.00%	XLY	Consumer Discret Sel Sect SPDR®	B+	99%CC	.5%Tech	.4%Ind		99%USA	.5%EU		LrgGrw	16.13%	0.97%	3Gld
7.00%	XLP	Consumer Staples Select Sector	A-	99%CD	1%HC			99%USA			LrgBld	0.69%	2.39%	4Brz
5.00%	SCZ	iShares MSCI EAFE Small-Cap	C+	23%Ind	14%CC	11%FS	10%Tech	36%EC	32%Jap		MidBld	5.36%	1.85%	3Brz
7.00%	IQLT	iShares MSCI Intl Quality Factor	B	19%FS	15%Ind	13%HC	11%CC	55%EC	14%UK	12%Jap	LrgBld	8.98%	2.81%	4Slv
5.00%	EMGF	iShares Em Mkts Eq Factor	C+	24%FS	24%Tech	12%CC		51%AE	29%AD	8%Lat	LrgBld	1.17%	4.03%	3Neu
3.00%	PSR	Invesco Active US Real Estate	B	100%FS				99%USA			MidBld	1.20%	2.97%	3Neu
5.00%	IFRA	iShares US Infrastructure	B	43%Util	33%Ind	15%Mat	8%Enr	99%USA			MSBld	3.44%	1.95%	4Slv
5.00%	GCC	WisdomTree Enhanced Cmdty ETF		34%Agr	29%Enr	21%Pme	15%Imet				LrgVal	-1.92%	*3.19%	1Brz
0.00%	FTGC	FT Global Tact Cmdty Strategy		40%Agr	28%Enr	28%Met	3%Liv				LrgVal	-3.41%	11.67%	4Neu
1.00%	CGW	Invesco S&P Global Water ETF	B+	55%Ind	36%Util	6%Mat	2%Tech	61%NA	18%Eur	12%UK	MidBld	6.95%	0.80%	4Slv
4.00%	GRN	iPath® Series B Carbon ETN	B	52%Mat	34%Enr	8%CD	2%FS	55%NA	11%UK	11%Austr	LrgVal	12.94%	0%	NR
80.00%	Subtotal													
100.00%	Total													

Index: The ETF Trading Symbol is followed by the name, credit rating, sector data when applicable, 1yr Returns, 12 month Yield, Morningstar stars and level Neutral, Silver, Bronze and Gold. This is followed by Market Cap and Style, and HQ if HighQuality.