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Have Rates Finally Found a Ceiling?

Mortgage rates have been moving higher at the **fastest pace** in more than a year. Just this week, they hit their highest levels in more than 4 years. But they also did something else they haven't done recently--something positive. Whether or not it's positive enough to suggest a broader shift remains to be seen.

The positive development occurred on the last day of the week. Don't get your hopes up for some astounding revelation. We're taking every **small victory** we can get at this point. Ready?

The last day of the week was the **first time in 2018** that rates (as measured by 10yr Treasury yields, the quintessential benchmark for longer-term rates in the US) ended the week **LOWER** than they ended the previous week. That's it.

While it might not **seem** like much (and indeed, it may not amount to much), these sorts of developments can act as small clues about a shift in momentum. The chart below will help **visualize** what's going on. In the top portion, each candlestick represents a **week** of trading. Solid candlesticks represent "**winning**" weeks where rates moved lower.

The histogram shows the week-over-week change in rates (and the very small break below the 'unchanged' line this week).

The lower pane of the chart delivers a more sobering reality, or perhaps a **healthy dose of caution** when it comes to the positive cues in the upper chart. In the lower pane, each candlestick represents only **one day**. It shows several examples of a back-to-back victories but a persistent **unwillingness** to break below the ascending trend-line.

National Average Mortgage Rates



	Rate	Change	Points
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Mortgage News Daily

30 Yr. Fixed	7.09%	+0.07	0.00
15 Yr. Fixed	6.56%	+0.03	0.00
30 Yr. FHA	6.62%	+0.07	0.00
30 Yr. Jumbo	7.35%	+0.04	0.00
5/1 ARM	7.30%	+0.06	0.00

Freddie Mac

30 Yr. Fixed	7.02%	-0.42	0.00
15 Yr. Fixed	6.28%	-0.48	0.00

Rates as of: 5/17

Market Data

	Price / Yield	Change
MBS UMBS 6.0	100.40	-0.15
MBS GNMA 6.0	100.78	+0.04
10 YR Treasury	4.4223	+0.0454
30 YR Treasury	4.5610	+0.0549

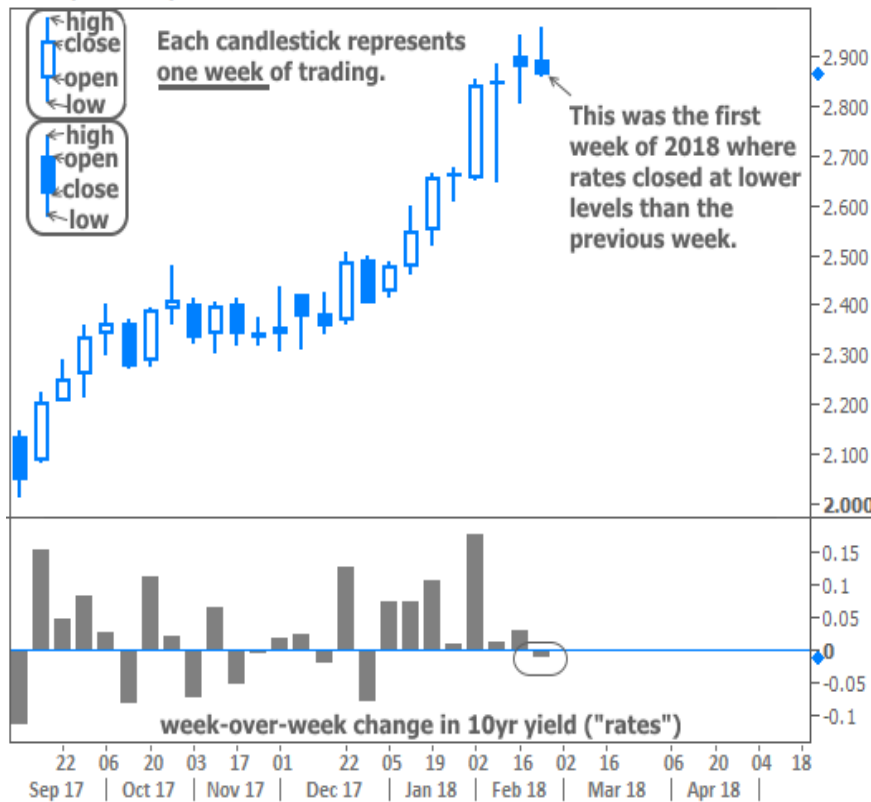
Pricing as of: 5/17 5:59PM EST

Recent Housing Data

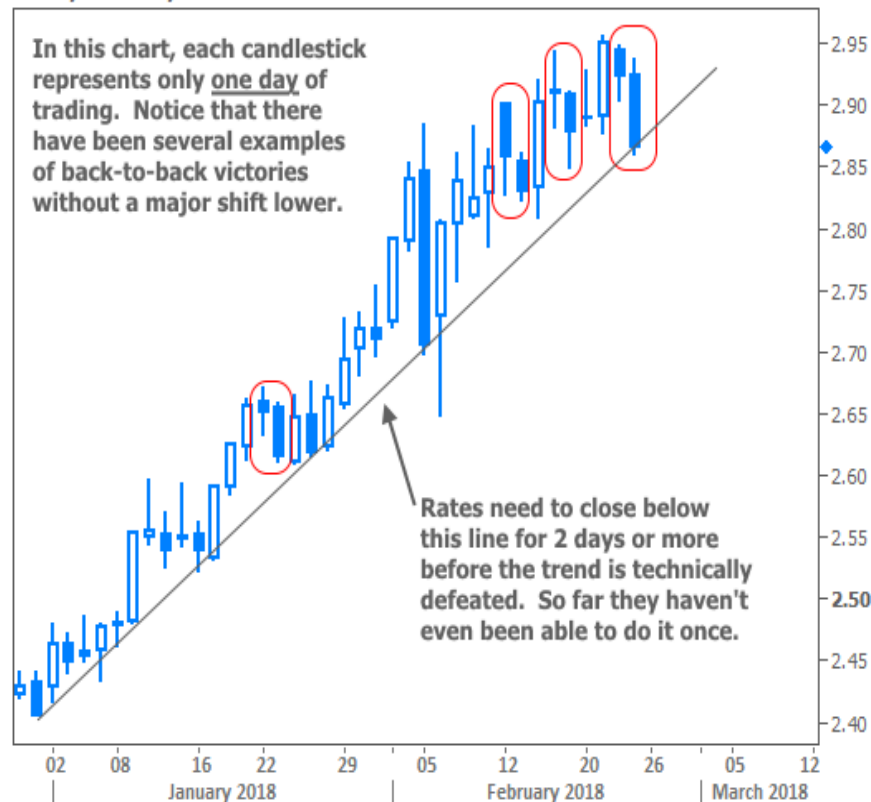
		Value	Change
Mortgage Apps	May 15	198.1	+0.51%
Building Permits	Mar	1.46M	-3.95%
Housing Starts	Mar	1.32M	-13.15%
New Home Sales	Mar	693K	+4.68%
Pending Home Sales	Feb	75.6	+1.75%
Existing Home Sales	Feb	3.97M	-0.75%
Builder Confidence	Mar	51	+6.25%

US Housing Market Weekly

US 10yr Treasury Yield



US 10yr Treasury Yield



Although it's not very fun, it's nonetheless important to keep in mind the **reasons** that rates are moving higher:

1. A fundamental shift in the amount of debt issued by the government

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US Treasuries are the foundation of interest rates in the US. The more there are, the lower the price. The lower the price, the higher the rate. Tax reform and infrastructure spending mean the government must issue more Treasuries, but how much more depends on the extent to which economic growth helps increase revenue (more people making more money and paying taxes). Needless to say, this is a very big unknown, but bond market participants have already done a lot to adjust for the potential outcomes.

2. Economic strength/optimism which, in turn, could push inflation higher

Inflation is a biggie. In the next chart, you'll be able to see how inflation not only has a direct impact on rates from day-to-day, but also on the Fed's rate hike outlook. The higher inflation goes, the worse it would be for rates. Economists are divided on whether a significant rise in inflation is a threat. Some are certain while others scoff at the notion. Either way, traders are accounting for the risks by pushing rates higher.

Rates vs Rate Hike Expectations For June



3. A Federal Reserve that was already in the process of trying to decrease its level of accommodation, but that now is all the more convinced

"Accommodation" = lower rates via the Fed Funds Rate and/or Fed bond buying. The Fed responds to changes in inflation, employment, and financial stability by adjusting its level of accommodation. They think things are going pretty darn well on all those fronts, so they've been raising their policy rate and decreasing the amount of bonds they buy each month (and yes, it's a double whammy for the Fed to be buying fewer bonds while the government is selling more).

The important thing to understand about these factors is just how glacial they are. We're **not** dealing with a singular surprising headline. We're not even dealing with a major development that happens to have an unknown long-term implication at the time (like the presidential election). These factors are already happening or will continue happening. They're unequivocally bad for rates.

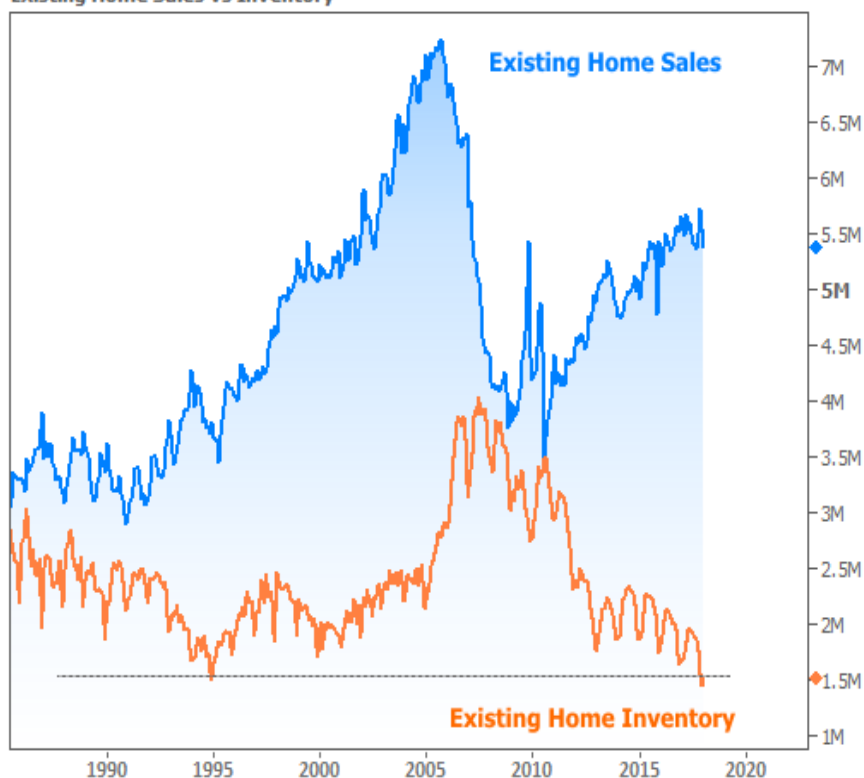
In other words, it **doesn't make sense** to expect any sort of major correction in rates, barring a tremendously unexpected and severe geopolitical or economic development (World War 3, massive market crash, etc.). In this environment, our most likely victories will be **shorter-term and more measured**. So when we talk about "turning points" in rates, we're hoping for an improvement of an eighth of a percentage point--maybe a quarter--before the glacial uptrend resumes.

How long that trend will continue is anyone's guess. **One thing's for sure** though. The people that matter certainly don't expect it to continue forever. Apart from higher rates acting as a natural brake on the economy (see the Home Sales Chart below), key investors and policymakers understand the next recession isn't a matter of "if," but "when."

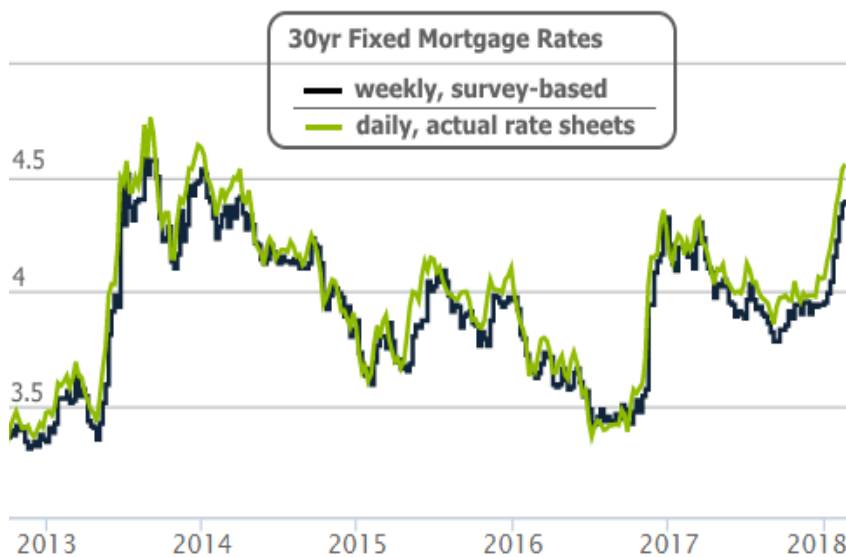
Just this week, there was a strange juxtaposition of strong comments from the Fed (in Wednesday's release of the Minutes from the late January Fed meeting) and a discussion about the tools that would be employed in the next major downturn or economic crisis. In that discussion, NY Fed President William Dudley reiterated his support of the Fed's bond buying plan in times of crisis. **More importantly**, he said the Fed might not need to decrease its bond buying as much as he previously thought. The less the Fed decreases its bond buying, the better it is for rates.

In housing-specific news, this week's Existing Home Sales data also made a comment on rates. Refreshingly, sales figures themselves have been holding up fairly well in spite of rising rates. It's inventory that continues to be the biggest issue.

Existing Home Sales vs Inventory



On that front, higher rates and expectations for a continued uptrend aren't exactly the right sort of enticement for **listings and move-up buyers**. These headwinds can, of course, be overcome if those buyers are making more money and feeling more economically secure, but those saving graces would take months to play out whereas higher rates are here today.



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About Michael

If you are thinking about buying or refinancing a home in the Kansas City area, you've probably faced the dilemma of hiring the right Loan Officer to handle your mortgage. You may be concerned about working with someone that doesn't know the area, or who doesn't listen to you. Maybe you're worried about a loan officer who is more concerned with a commission than making sure you're properly taken care of.

Great news - I can help!

IF YOU ARE THINKING OF BUYING A HOME... I would love to share with you the mortgage loan products that are available to you, and also talk about what homes might be coming onto the market very soon. As a Kansas City resident who also went to college just down the street in Lawrence, I'm not just your loan officer but also your neighbor. I'd love to talk to you about my knowledge not only about the Kansas City market, and what neighborhoods would be perfect to you but also help you truly understand the landscape of the mortgage industry today, and introduce you to great Real Estate Agents that are ready to go to work for you and find you the perfect home. I'll help guide you through appraisals, inspections, title searches, and finally closing.

IF YOU ARE A REALTOR LOOKING FOR A REFERRAL PARTNER... I would love to sit down with you over a cup of coffee and show you ways to generate leads for your business and help you grow your clientele through some easy processes that NO other Real Estate Agents are doing. I am a growing Social Media guru that can show you my tips and tricks on how I've doubled my Twitter base in just a month!

If it sounds like I can help you, please contact me directly through Linked In, email me at mbaker@affinityhomeloan.com or call/text me at 913-735-5363. If you're not yet ready for a conversation, but you'd like to learn more about me and how I can help you or about the mortgage process in general, including great blog posts to send out to your clients, check out my website at <http://www.michaelbakerhomeloans.com>.

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