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Mortgage Rates Barely Budged in Response to Fed Rate Hike

It's a common refrain in this newsletter: The Fed does not hike/cut mortgage rates and the two can often move in opposite directions in the short-term.

Mortgage rates were already surging above 7% last week as oil prices broke above $100 per barrel and diesel prices at the pump reached all-time highs. Inflation data also increased the odds of a Fed rate hike this week, adding to the upward pressure.

This is one of the main ways the Fed Funds Rate actually matters to longer-term rates such as mortgages. Financial markets begin accounting for an expected Fed move well before the Fed actually makes it. By the time the Fed meets, mortgage rates have already priced in the expected decision and are waiting for new information about what comes next.

Unfortunately, the Fed delivered that new information on Wednesday.

The rate hike itself did absolutely nothing to the underlying bond market. Bonds barely moved when the decision was announced at 2pm ET. Rates didn't begin moving higher until Fed Chair Kevin Warsh's press conference started 30 minutes later.

Why? Simply put, Warsh strongly implied that additional hikes are coming. He described Wednesday's hike as "removing some accommodation." When the Fed says policy is accommodative, it means the current Fed Funds Rate is doing slightly more to promote economic growth and inflation than to restrain them. By saying only "some" accommodation had been removed, Warsh effectively hinted at more rate hikes in the near term.

Warsh also said inflation trends had not improved, the economy had strengthened and the geopolitical situation had deteriorated. All three points argue in favor of additional rate hikes.

As we noted last week, there have been indications that longer-term rates were looking for reassurance that the Fed was firmly committed to fighting inflation. Wednesday's hike and press conference more than delivered. Although that caused significant volatility on Wednesday, mortgage rates improved almost all the way back to the best levels of the week on Thursday.

The underlying bond market weakened again on Friday for reasons that may have been incidental to the week's main story. One possibility involved the forex market, specifically Japan selling Treasuries to support the value of its

MBS and Treasury

	Price / Yield	Change
MBS UMBS 6.0	99.58	+0.48
10 YR Treasury	4.9238	-0.1198
30 YR Treasury	5.3131	-0.0931

Pricing as of: 11/20 3:54PM EST

Recent Housing Data

		Value	Change
Mortgage Apps	Nov 11	199.8	-2.35%
Building Permits	Oct	1.3M	-7.5%
Housing Starts	Oct	1.31M	+7.21%
New Home Sales	Sep	676K	-1.17%
Pending Home Sales	Oct	63	-4.69%
Existing Home Sales	Oct	3.99M	+0.25%
Builder Confidence	Nov	25	-13.79%

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currency. Either way, the average mortgage lender wasn't too much worse for the wear.

The week ahead offers little in terms of truly big-ticket economic data despite a fairly busy calendar. Oil price volatility is as likely as anything to set the tone for day-to-day rate momentum.

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Recent Economic Data

Date	Event	Actual	Forecast	Prior
Tuesday, Sep 15				
8:30AM	Sep NY Fed Manufacturing	7.60	14.75	20.60
Wednesday, Sep 16				
7:00AM	Sep/11 MBA Purchase Index	156.2		157.5
7:00AM	Sep/11 MBA Refi Index	627.1		687.3
8:30AM	Aug Import prices mm (%)	0.7%	0.4%	-0.4%
8:30AM	Aug Retail Sales (%)	1.2%	0.8%	-0.6%
10:00AM	Sep NAHB housing market indx	32	34	35
2:00PM	Fed Interest Rate Decision	4%	4%	3.75%
2:30PM	Warsh Press Conference			
Thursday, Sep 17				
8:30AM	Sep/12 Jobless Claims (k)	196K	208K	206K
8:30AM	Sep Philly Fed Business Index	37.8	30.5	47.4
8:30AM	Aug Building Permits (ml)	1.394M	1.41M	1.433M
8:30AM	Aug Housing starts number mm (ml)	1.275M	1.31M	1.239M
10:00AM	Aug Pending Home Sales (%)	0.3%	2%	-2.3%
Friday, Sep 18				
9:15AM	Aug Industrial Production (%)	0%	0.3%	0.2%
Thursday, Sep 24				
8:30AM	Sep/19 Jobless Claims (k)	197K	201K	196K
10:00AM	Aug New Home Sales (ml)	0.684M	0.62M	0.607M
Friday, Sep 25				
8:30AM	Aug Durable goods (%)	0%	-0.4%	1.1%
10:00AM	Sep Consumer Sentiment (ip)	48.1	47.6	51.7

Event Importance:

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

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