

Mark Yecies

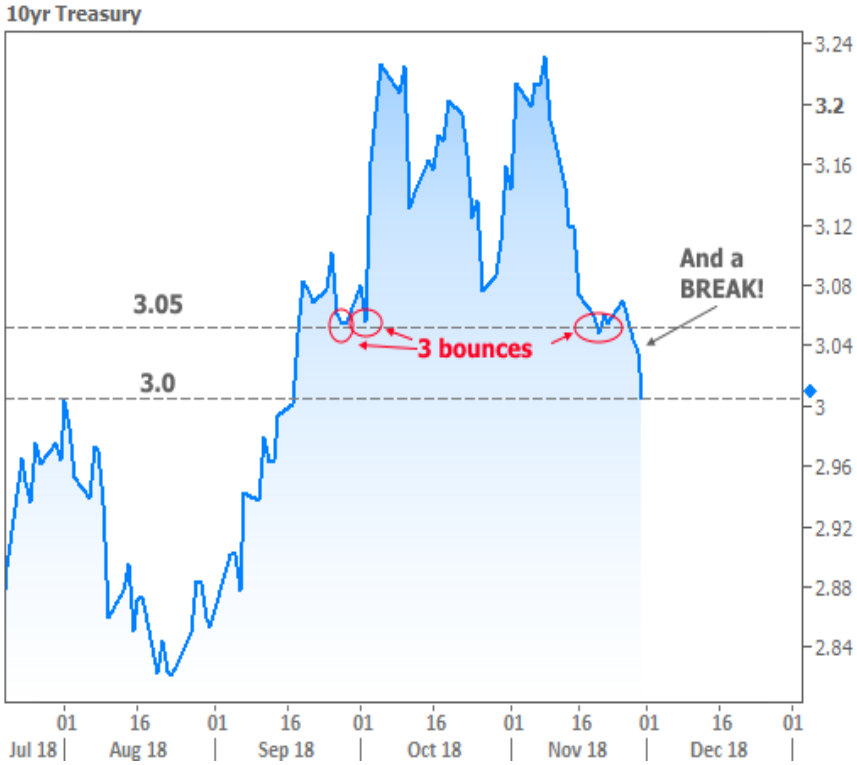
Vice President Mortgage Lending, Guaranteed Rate Affinity
18958
16 Arcadian Ave, Unit C-6 Paramus, NJ 07652

Office: 973-713-7964
Mobile: 9737137964
mark.yecies@grarate.com
View My Website

Are The Highest Interest Rates Behind Us?

Relative to the last 2 years of pain for rates, a **sense of hope** has emerged, seemingly overnight, as the 10yr Treasury yield (an important benchmark for longer-term rates like mortgages) broke through a key level.

3.05% had **consistently blocked** the advance of falling rates for more than 2 months. The most recent bounce happened just last week. Breaking through sets us up to challenge the big psychological barrier at 3.0%.



The catalyst for the late week surge was a **speech by Fed Chair Jerome Powell.** The Fed sets monetary policies that can have a direct impact on rates. Those policies are largely a function of objective economic data, but there is some room for interpretation.

The Fed's interpretation has arguably been fairly balanced over the past few years. On the one hand, they've been hiking at a much slower pace compared to past cycles. On the other hand, they've been hiking **regularly** and their outlook has clearly called for those hikes to **continue** well into 2019.

National Average Mortgage Rates



Mortgage News Daily	Rate	Change	Points
30YR Fixed	7.29%	+0.03	0.00
15YR Fixed	6.93%	+0.11	0.00
30YR FHA	6.97%	+0.02	0.00
30YR Jumbo	7.40%	0.00	0.00
7/6 SOFR	6.68%	+0.08	0.00
30YR VA	6.99%	+0.03	0.00

Rates as of: 11/27

MBS and Treasury

	Price / Yield	Change
MBS UMBS 6.0	99.65	-0.24
10 YR Treasury	4.9345	+0.0755
30 YR Treasury	5.3271	+0.0792

Pricing as of: 11/27 5:59PM EST

Recent Housing Data

		Value	Change
Mortgage Apps	Nov 18	212	+6.11%
Building Permits	Oct	1.3M	-7.5%
Housing Starts	Oct	1.31M	+7.21%
New Home Sales	Oct	701K	+3.7%
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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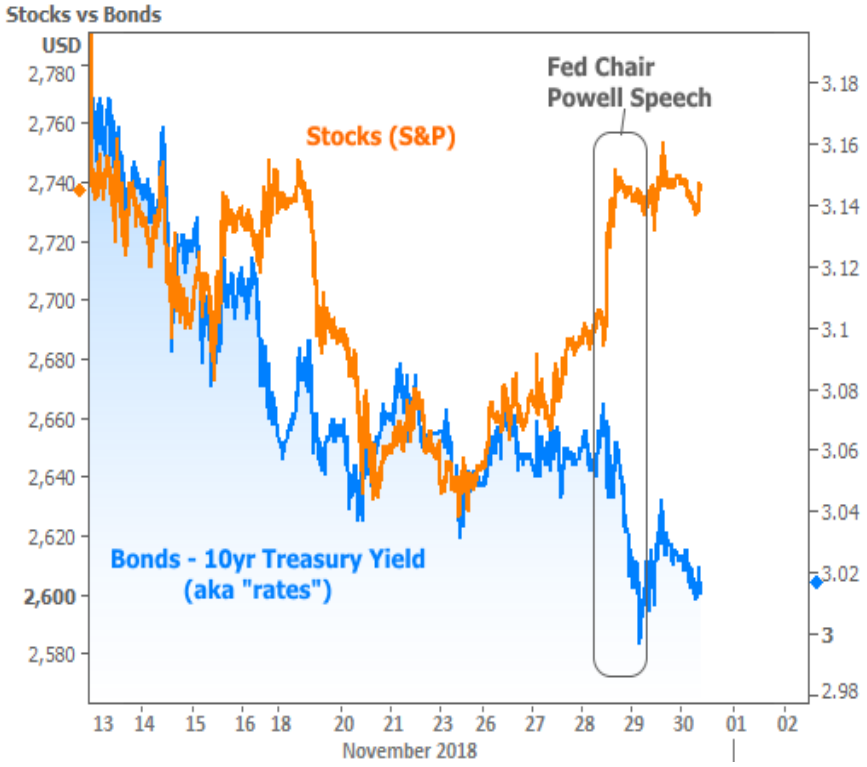
Powell's speech upset the balance as far as many investors were concerned. Back in October, Powell said rates were "a long way from neutral, probably" before adding that the Fed may even raise rates past neutral (a level that neither promotes or discourages economic growth). He'd been sticking to that script regularly **until this week** when he said rates are now "just below" neutral.

Beyond the comment on rates, Powell also noted that the Fed's rate hike outlook is **no guarantee** of a policy path (translation: they might not end up hiking as much as anticipated). The determining factor in that policy path will be economic data. On that topic, Powell said the Fed "will be paying very close attention."

Stocks and bonds both seized on the **apparent shift** in tone from the Fed Chair. In general, when the Fed is perceived as less likely to hike rates, both sides of the market rally. That can be seen in the following chart with stocks surging and rates falling.



Combined with the positive move in rates that began 3 weeks ago, a sense of hope seems to be returning to the bond market. Keep in mind that at least **some** of that "hope" will come at the **expense** of stocks and the economy. After all, rates tend to fall when the economy is weak.

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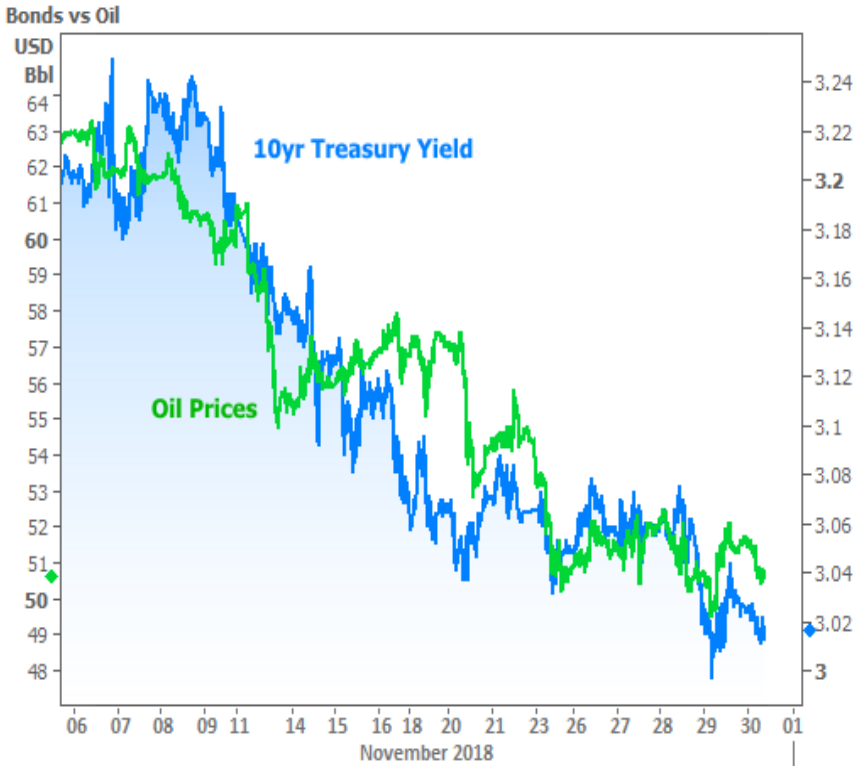
You might notice that the blue line (bonds) was more willing to move lower than the orange line (stocks) in November. Of course we just discussed the Powell effect, but well before Powell's speech, we can see bonds setting "lower lows" even as stocks try to hold the same defensive floor. One potential reason is **weakness in oil prices**. Oil has a bearing on inflation, and inflation has a bearing on bonds. Falling oil prices can add downward pressure on rates.



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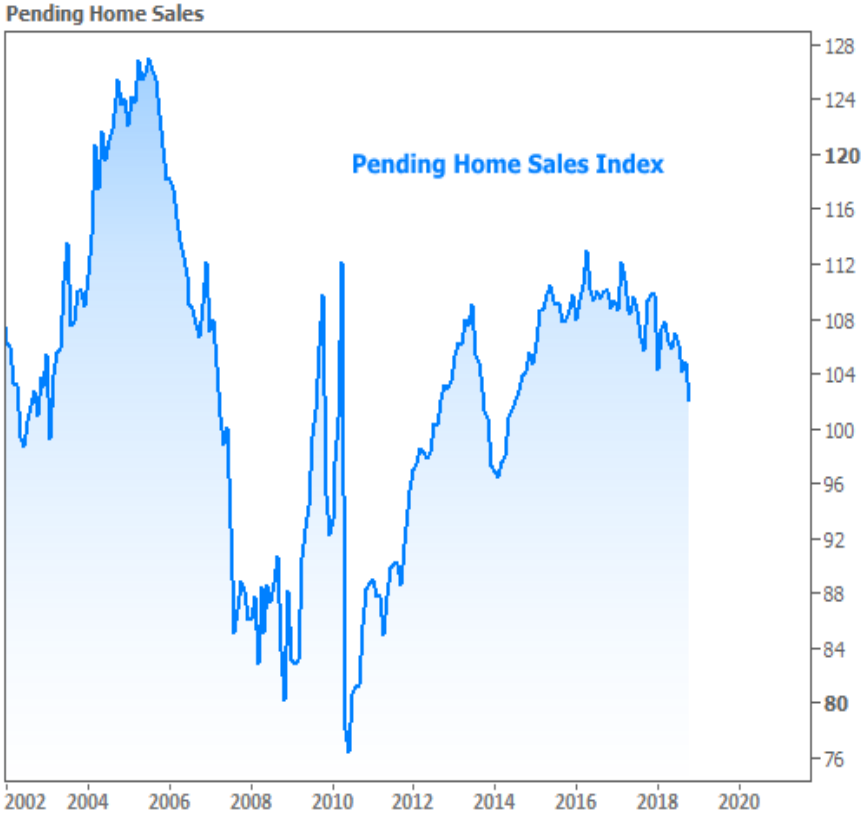
If these positive influences stick around, the highest rates for this economic cycle may indeed already be behind us. That **couldn't come a moment too soon** for the housing market where sales continued to slump according to two reports out this week.

New Home Sales



Pending Home Sales



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Still, it's not necessarily safe to assume rates will keep moving lower. Keep Powell's comments about economic data in mind. The Fed will be watching the data closely. To whatever extent next week's important economic reports disappoint, **hope will remain alive** for rates. But if those reports are stronger than expected, rates could easily bounce back toward recent highs.

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Recent Economic Data

Date	Event	Actual	Forecast	Prior
Tuesday, Nov 27				
9:00AM	Sep CaseShiller 20 yy (%)	+5.1	5.3	5.5
9:00AM	Sep Monthly Home Price mm (%)	0.2		0.3
10:00AM	Nov Consumer confidence	135.7	135.9	137.9
Wednesday, Nov 28				
7:00AM	w/e MBA Purchase Index	247.8		227.7
7:00AM	w/e Mortgage Refinance Index	787.7		783.7
8:30AM	Q3 GDP Prelim (%)	3.5	3.5	3.5
10:00AM	Oct New home sales-units mm (ml)	0.544	0.575	0.553
10:00AM	Oct New home sales chg mm (%)	-8.9	3.7	-5.5
Thursday, Nov 29				
8:30AM	Oct Core PCE (y/y) (%)	+1.8	1.9	2.0
8:30AM	Oct Personal Income (%)	+0.5	0.4	0.2
8:30AM	Oct Consumer Spending (Consumption) (%)	+0.6	0.4	0.4
10:00AM	Oct Pending Sales Index	102.1		104.6
10:00AM	Oct Pending Home Sales (%)	-2.6	0.5	0.5
Friday, Nov 30				
9:45AM	Nov Chicago PMI	66.4	58.0	58.4
Monday, Dec 03				
10:00AM	Oct Construction spending (%)	-0.1	0.4	0.0
10:00AM	Nov ISM Manufacturing PMI	59.3	57.6	57.7
10:00AM	Nov ISM Mfg Prices Paid	60.7	70.0	71.6
Tuesday, Dec 04				
9:45AM	Nov ISM-New York index	840.8		831.9
Wednesday, Dec 05				
7:00AM	w/e Mortgage Refinance Index	836.4		787.7
7:00AM	w/e MBA Purchase Index	249.9		247.8
Thursday, Dec 06				
8:15AM	Nov ADP National Employment (k)	179	195	227
8:30AM	w/e Jobless Claims (k)	231	230	234
10:00AM	Oct Factory orders mm (%)	-2.1	-2.0	0.7
10:00AM	Nov ISM N-Mfg PMI	60.7	59.2	60.3

Event Importance:

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

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Date	Event	Actual	Forecast	Prior
10:00AM	Nov ISM N-Mfg Bus Act	65.2	62.0	62.5
Friday, Dec 07				
8:30AM	Nov Non-farm payrolls (k)	155	175	250
8:30AM	Nov Unemployment rate mm (%)	3.7	3.7	3.7
8:30AM	Nov Average earnings mm (%)	0.2	0.3	0.2
10:00AM	Oct Wholesale inventories mm (%)	0.8	0.7	0.7
10:00AM	Dec Consumer Sentiment	97.5	97.0	97.5

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