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Clearing Up Some Mortgage-Related Tax Bill Confusion

If you missed it, the last newsletter (read it here) focused on several of the tax bill's implications for **housing** and **mortgage** markets. It also gave a great rundown of recently stellar housing market data.

The current week didn't have any amazing housing data--nor were financial markets even back to full power after the holiday break. That left plenty of time for conversations about some of the more **confusing** parts of the tax bill.

Chief among these "confusing" parts is the topic of **HELOCs** or Home Equity Lines of Credit. Most news stories on the tax bill are quick to point out that HELOCs are no longer tax deductible. In actuality, they are subject to almost **exactly** the same changes as 1st mortgages.

The **simplest** way to understand the tax changes that relate to deducting mortgage interest is with the concept of **"acquisition indebtedness."** Simply put: if debt was taken out to buy a home, that debt will always be deductible, even if it's refinanced in the future.

Loans for homes under contract before 12/15/2017 get the old $1 million cap while everything after that gets the new $750k cap (for the next 8 years).

Confusion arose due to the **specific inclusion** of HELOCs in the tax bill. The explanatory statement says: "Additionally, the conference agreement suspends the deduction for interest on home equity indebtedness."

To be fair, that **does** sound pretty conclusive. To the untrained eye, it may seem that nothing about a HELOC is deductible from here on out. But consider this: "home equity indebtedness" is **clearly and legally defined** as "**any** indebtedness OTHER THAN ACQUISITION INDEBTEDNESS, secured by a qualified residence..."

There is some additional legalese after that (feel free to check it out here), but it doesn't affect the following assertion: as long as "acquisition indebtedness" can include a HELOC, then HELOCs are deductible. So **without further ado:**

> The term “acquisition indebtedness” means **any** indebtedness which is incurred in **acquiring, constructing, or substantially improving** any qualified residence of the taxpayer, and is secured by such residence. Such term also includes any indebtedness secured by such residence resulting from the refinancing of indebtedness meeting the requirements of the preceding sentence (or this sentence)

National Average Mortgage Rates

	Rate	Change	Points
Mortgage News Daily			
30 Yr. Fixed	7.07%	+0.02	0.00
15 Yr. Fixed	6.45%	0.00	0.00
30 Yr. FHA	6.51%	+0.02	0.00
30 Yr. Jumbo	7.26%	0.00	0.00
5/1 ARM	7.02%	-0.01	0.00
Freddie Mac			
30 Yr. Fixed	6.86%	-0.01	0.00
15 Yr. Fixed	6.16%	+0.03	0.00

Rates as of: 6/28

Market Data

	Price / Yield	Change
MBS UMBS 5.5	98.49	-0.45
MBS GNMA 5.5	99.10	-0.44
10 YR Treasury	4.4109	+0.0129
30 YR Treasury	4.5741	+0.0101

Pricing as of: 7/1 6:48AM EST

Recent Housing Data

		Value	Change
Mortgage Apps	Jun 12	208.5	+15.58%
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%

In other words, it doesn't matter if it's a HELOC, 30yr fixed, or 5 million year option ARM. If it was used to buy the home or substantially improve it, **it's deductible** ($1m if grandfathered, or $750k otherwise).

Shifting gears to **interest rate movements**, the past few weeks have been notable in that mortgage rates are performing as well as they have versus benchmarks in several years. What does that mean?

A **"benchmark"** in financial markets can be thought of as a **yardstick** by which a certain financial instrument is measured. In the case of mortgage rates, the most widely-used benchmark is the 10yr Treasury yield. As today's first chart shows, there's ample correlation.

In fact, there's so much correlation that it can be hard to see how mortgages are performing until we plot a separate line that simply measures the **distance between** mortgage rates and 10yr yields. That's what the green line does below (NOTE: the orange and blue lines look closer together than they actually are because each has its own y-axis in order to show the correlation in their movement).

Keeping an eye on trends in 10yr yields is useful for mortgage rate watchers. It helps us see **potential danger zones** as soon as possible. With that in mind, the 2.48% and 2.50% levels have been acting as ceilings recently. In short, fans of low rates would very much like to see these ceilings continue to hold. If they're broken, it could result in some sustained momentum toward higher rates to begin the new year.

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Recent Economic Data

Date	Event	Actual	Forecast	Prior
Tuesday, Jan 02				
7:00AM	w/e Mortgage Refinance Index			1240.5
7:00AM	w/e MBA Purchase Index			234.3
Wednesday, Jan 03				
10:00AM	Dec ISM Manufacturing PMI	59.7	58.1	58.2
Thursday, Jan 04				
8:15AM	Dec ADP National Employment (k)	250	190	190
Friday, Jan 05				
8:30AM	Dec Non-farm payrolls (k)	148	190	228
8:30AM	Dec Unemployment rate mm (%)	4.1	4.1	4.1
10:00AM	Dec ISM N-Mfg PMI	55.9	57.6	57.4
10:00AM	Nov Factory orders mm (%)	1.3	1.1	-0.1
Tuesday, Jan 09				
1:00PM	3-Yr Note Auction (bl)	24		
Wednesday, Jan 10				
8:30AM	Dec Import prices mm (%)	0.1	0.5	0.7

Event Importance:

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

Date	Event	Actual	Forecast	Prior
8:30AM	Dec Export prices mm (%)	-0.1	0.3	0.5
10:00AM	Nov Wholesale inventories mm (%)	+0.8	0.7	0.7
1:00PM	10-yr Note Auction (bl)	20		
Thursday, Jan 11				
8:30AM	Dec Producer Prices (%)	-0.1	0.2	0.4
8:30AM	Dec Core Producer Prices YY (%)	2.3	2.5	2.4
8:30AM	w/e Jobless Claims (k)	261	252	250
1:00PM	30-Yr Bond Auction (bl)	12		
Friday, Jan 12				
8:30AM	Dec Retail Sales (%)	0.4	0.4	0.8
8:30AM	Dec CPI mm, sa (%)	0.1	0.2	0.4
8:30AM	Dec Core CPI Year/Year (%)	1.8	1.7	1.7
10:00AM	Nov Business Inventories (%)	0.4	0.3	-0.1

Real Talk

At The Rate Shop, we're not your average mortgage banker. We specialize in bringing you ridiculously low interest rates that will make you wonder what the other guys are doing. In fact the ONLY objection we ever hear is “your rates sound too good to be true”. Well they’re not, and here is why…

After 15 years in the retail banking world I was frustrated with the high interest rates that came from that business model. As I looked around at all the bloated layers of management and their expensive salaries and the overhead of running a larger company (think rent costs, employee health and benefit costs, payroll taxes, and on and on) it dawned on me that I was a part of the problem, and the solution, for me at least, was so easy to see.

Start my own mortgage brokerage shop. No expensive executive salaries, no expensive building to pay rent at, no unnecessary employees and all the costs that are associated with that. What happens when you cut out all the fat? You can provide lower rates and lower closing costs. It’s simple. Now here is the best part, you still get great service from a local Kansas City Lender. My mission is to let everyone know that low rates and great customer service are NOT mutually exclusive.

Thanks for coming along on this journey where Low Rates meet Great Service. The two do NOT have to be mutually exclusive. It’s just a lie that the big box mortgage companies have been telling you for years. Don’t believe me? Give me a call or shoot me a text on my personal cell phone today and compare my rates and costs up against any other lender in the country, and be prepared to be blown away.

Mike Baker