Weekly Commentary

APRIL 23, 2018

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Take on economic data depends upon the beholder

Last week's economic reports presented the classic "glass half full or half empty" perception for investors. Various manufacturing measures continued to climb, but at a lower rate. Regional Federal Reserve data was either good with signs of slowing or slowing with signs of good numbers on the horizon. Industrial production had a healthy level of growth in the first quarter, but that appeared less vigorous compared to an excellent final quarter of 2017. Retail sales improved in March, with the best reading in four months. But much of its strength came from purchases that would seem to have been delayed in the heart of winter, such as auto purchases.

Lastly, housing starts roared back in March, but only in multifamily buildings. You'd like to see growth in the more steady single-family housing market, which actually declined. At least markets could count on one metric that always seems to be an unabated positive in recent years: the report on first-time applications for unemployment benefits was again near multi-decade lows.

The London interbank offered rate (Libor) modestly rose across the short end of the yield curve last week, with 1-month remaining at 1.90%, 3-month inching up 1 basis point to 2.36% and 6-month increasing 2 basis points to 2.51%.