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Rates Near Lowest Levels in Over a Year

Last week saw an unexpected drop in rates as trade war headlines rocked financial markets. Things looked set to calm down this week, but the drama continued. This time around, mortgage rates were able to keep slightly better pace with the broader bond market. The result is a return to levels that are very close to the lowest in more than a year.

What do we mean by "keep better pace with the bond market?"

There are many different kinds of interest rates based on many different underlying assets. It's a common misconception that mortgage rates are based on US Treasury yields. While certain adjustable rate mortgages can use the US government bond market as an index, the most prevalent mortgage--the 30yr fixed--is actually based on a mortgage-specific bond known as a mortgage-backed security (MBS).

There's good reason for the misconception though! MBS yields tend to follow Treasury yields in almost perfect proportion. The chart below overlays MBS yield movement with 10yr Treasury yields. As you can see, they're frequently almost indistinguishable.

National Average Mortgage Rates



Mortgage News Daily	Rate	Change	Points
30YR Fixed	7.33%	-0.12	0.00
15YR Fixed	6.89%	-0.10	0.00
30YR FHA	6.95%	-0.10	0.00
30YR Jumbo	7.44%	-0.06	0.00
7/6 SOFR	6.81%	-0.19	0.00
30YR VA	6.97%	-0.10	0.00

Rates as of: 11/20

MBS and Treasury

	Price / Yield	Change
MBS UMBS 6.0	99.51	+0.41
10 YR Treasury	4.9403	-0.1033
30 YR Treasury	5.3324	-0.0738

Pricing as of: 11/20 5:59PM EST

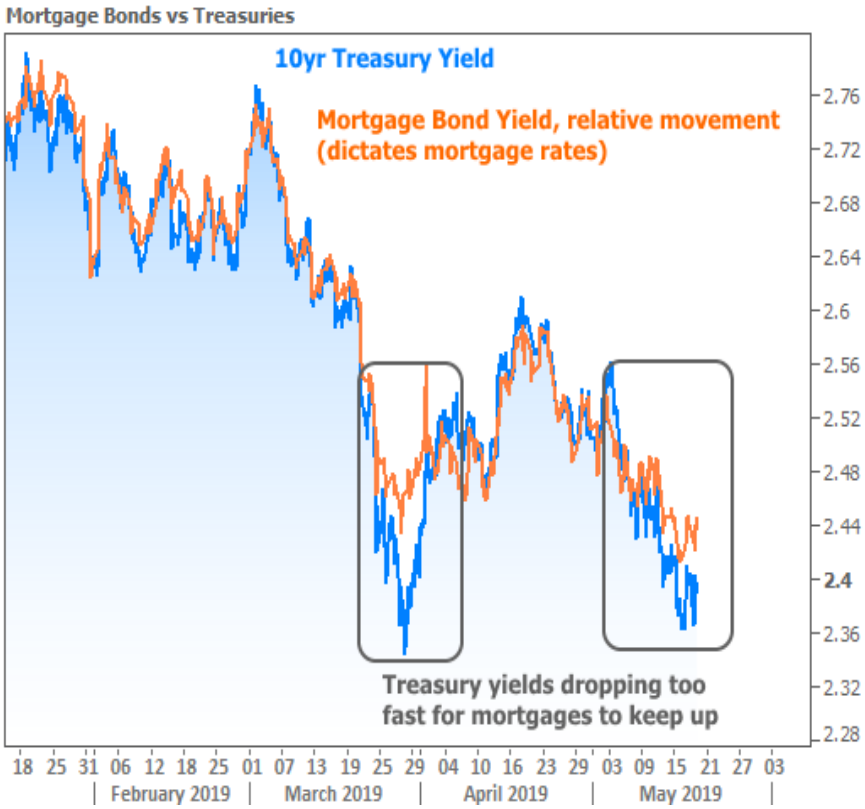
Recent Housing Data

		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%

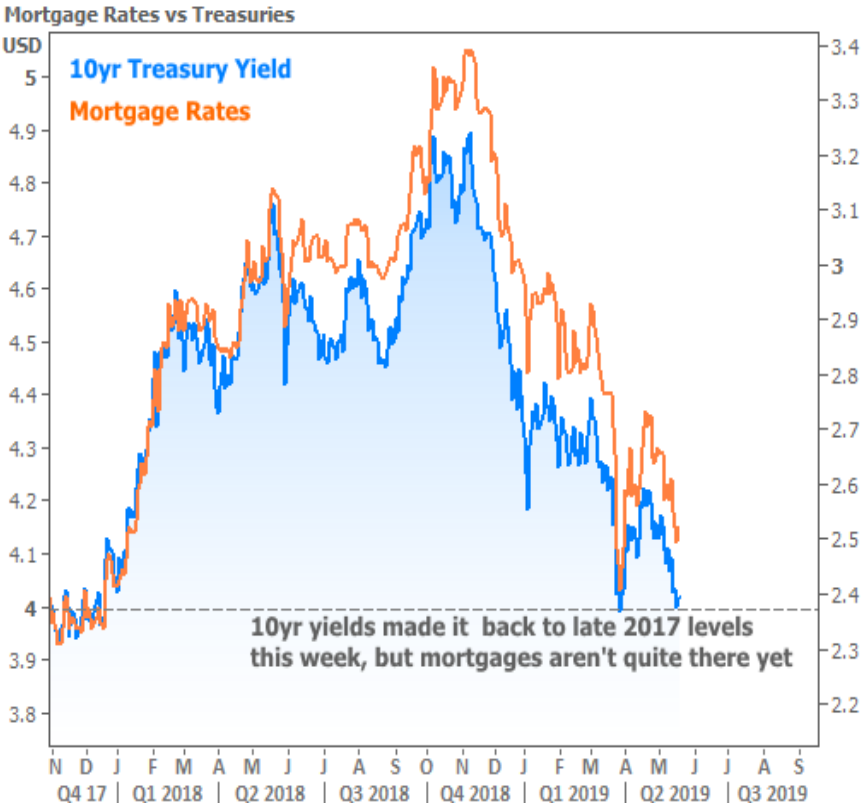
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The highlighted portions of the chart show a common phenomenon. When rates really get on a roll, the mortgage market can struggle to keep pace. We saw this in late March and again in the past few weeks. The net effect is that mortgage rates haven't yet returned to the same late-2017 lows seen in 10yr Treasury yields.



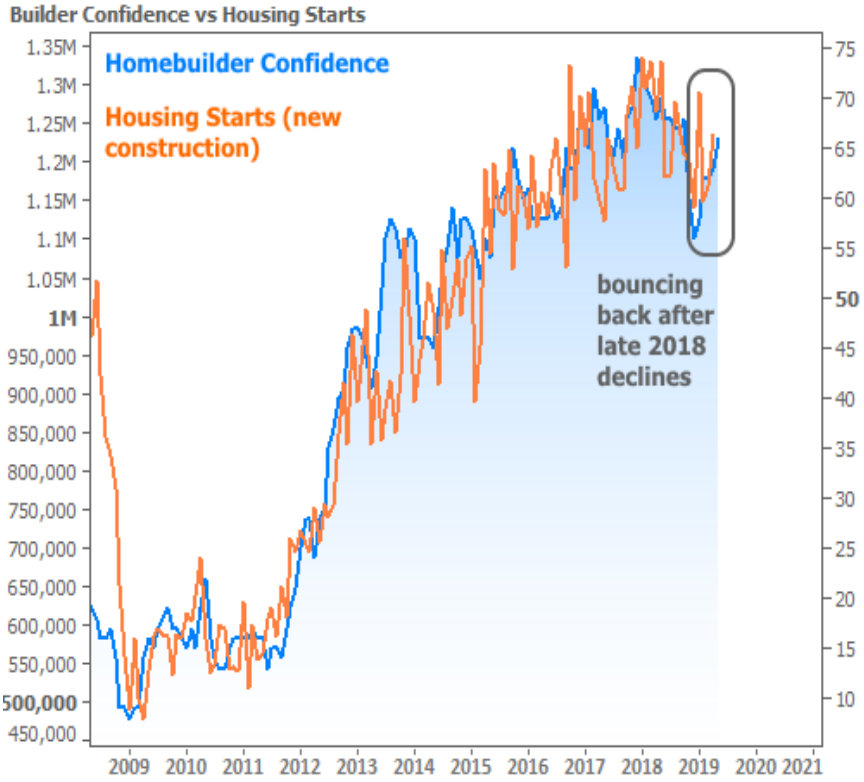
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If the move in mortgage rates still looks pretty good to you, you're not alone. At the lowest point of the week, rates were **extremely close** to the lows seen at the end of March. Those were the best levels in well over a year.

The favorable interest rate environment is not lost on housing! While it certainly doesn't hurt that we're in the throes of the Spring/Summer homebuying season, low rates are definitely helping to prolong a nice rebound in homebuilding, sales, and sentiment. Both the NAHB housing market index (builder confidence) and Housing Starts (new residential construction) data came out this week, and both added to the trend leading back up from late 2018 lows.



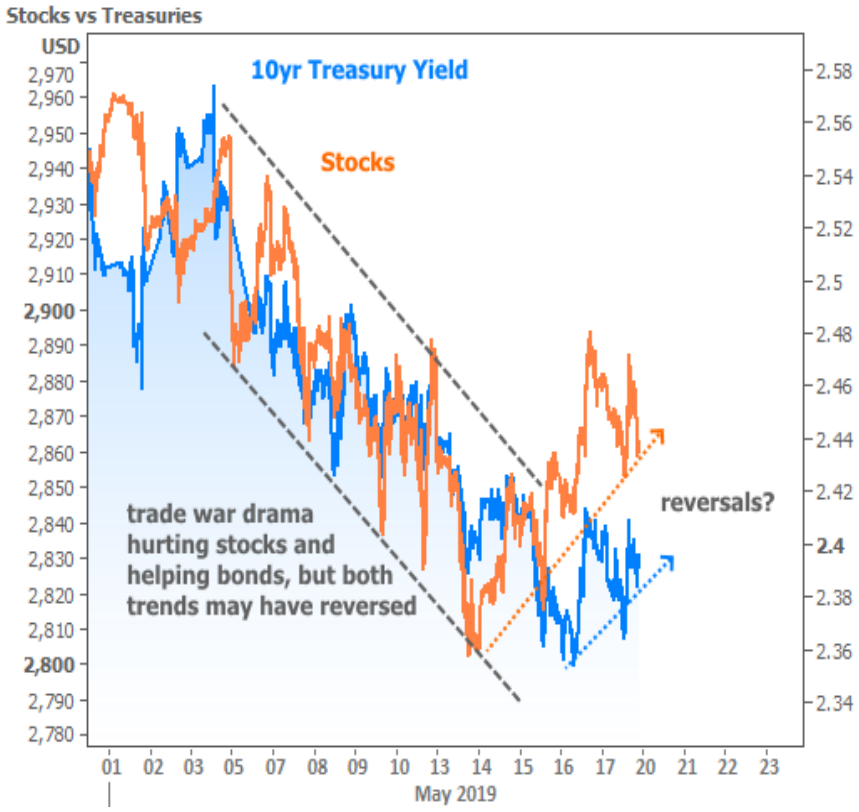
As for the market moves underpinning the low rate environment, this week was more diverse compared to last week's heavy dose of trade war news. Granted, there were still several trade-related headlines moving stocks and bonds this week, but rates specifically benefited from a clash between Italy and the EU over the country's proposed budget on Wednesday. Later that same day, US Retail Sales data came out **much weaker than expected**. After a modest correction on Thursday, more US/China trade headlines kept bond yields and interest rates from rising.

In the slightly bigger picture, however, it continues to look like the most volatile reaction to the trade war flare-up has **come and gone** as of last week. The net effect is that stocks and bonds look like they're **trying to move back in the other direction (i.e. higher)**. This is even more apparent in stocks. Bonds probably would have followed had it not been for the Italian news and the weak economic data (both of which have a more pronounced effect on the bond market whereas trade war headlines were equal opportunity market movers).

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Next week is fairly light on economic data with only few reports worth mentioning (New Home Sales, Existing Sales, and Durable Goods Orders). In addition to the data, we'll also get the Minutes from the most recent Fed meeting, which will give markets a bit more context for the Fed's current line of thinking. That would **normally** be a bigger potential source of volatility, but numerous Fed members have been on the speaking circuit with a fairly unified message about keeping rates steady and needing to be "patient" before deciding if the next move is a cut or a hike.

Finally, the week will be cut short for an early close on Friday and a 3 day weekend for Memorial Day. Weeks leading up to major holiday weekends are **often idiosyncratic** from a trading standpoint. In other words, **we may have to wait** until the following week to get a clearer sense of the prevailing interest rate momentum.

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Recent Economic Data

Date	Event	Actual	Forecast	Prior
Tuesday, May 14				
8:30AM	Apr Import prices mm (%)	0.2	0.7	0.6
8:30AM	Apr Export prices mm (%)	0.2	0.5	0.7
Wednesday, May 15				
7:00AM	w/e MBA Purchase Index	268.5		270.2
7:00AM	w/e Mortgage Refinance Index	1232.6		1238.5
8:30AM	Apr Retail Sales (%)	-0.2	0.2	1.6
8:30AM	May NY Fed Manufacturing	17.80	8.50	10.10
9:15AM	Apr Industrial Production (%)	-0.5	0.0	-0.1

Event Importance:

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

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Date	Event	Actual	Forecast	Prior
9:15AM	Apr Capacity Utilization (%)	77.9	78.7	78.8
10:00AM	Mar Business Inventories (%)	0.0	0.0	0.3
Thursday, May 16				
8:30AM	Apr Building permits: number (ml)	1.296	1.290	1.288
8:30AM	Apr House starts mm: change (%)	5.7		-0.3
8:30AM	Apr Housing starts number mm (ml)	1.235	1.205	1.139
8:30AM	Apr Build permits: change mm (%)	0.6		-0.2
8:30AM	May Philly Fed Business Index	16.6	9.0	8.5
8:30AM	w/e Jobless Claims (k)	212	215	228
8:30AM	w/e Continued jobless claims (ml)	1.660	1.680	1.684
Friday, May 17				
10:00AM	May Consumer Sentiment	102.4	97.5	97.2
10:00AM	May 1yr Inflation Outlook (%)	2.8		2.5
10:00AM	May 5yr Inflation Outlook (%)	2.6		2.3
10:00AM	Apr Leading index chg mm (%)	0.2	0.2	0.4
Tuesday, May 21				
10:00AM	Apr Existing home sales (ml)	5.19	5.35	5.21
10:00AM	Apr Exist. home sales % chg (%)	-0.4	2.7	-4.9
Wednesday, May 22				
7:00AM	w/e Mortgage Refinance Index	1334.9		1232.6
7:00AM	w/e MBA Purchase Index	263.0		268.5
Thursday, May 23				
8:30AM	w/e Jobless Claims (k)	211	215	212
10:00AM	Apr New home sales chg mm (%)	-6.9	-2.8	4.5
10:00AM	Apr New home sales-units mm (ml)	0.673	0.675	0.692
Friday, May 24				
8:30AM	Apr Durable goods (%)	-2.1	-2.0	2.6

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