PARTY ON?

The U.S. economy continues its post-pandemic expansion – resisting the growth-dampening intentions of restrictive monetary policy. The Federal Reserve (Fed) has hiked interest rates by a cumulative 5% the past five quarters (a brisk 1% per quarter pace); in response, the labor market has added nearly five million jobs over that timeframe. Interestingly, the U.S. economy regained pre-pandemic employment levels exactly one year ago – meaning the bulk of the jobs created during the current Fed rate hiking campaign (roughly five million) aren't just refilling the pandemic hole, but instead represent true growth in the U.S. employment base. This has kept the U.S. consumer in spending mode, averaging 2.1% real growth (above and beyond inflation) the past five quarters. Put another way, the party has not slowed as the Fed had hoped.

Closing time. While the Fed has been hiking interest rates since March of 2022, only since (approximately) last September has the Fed been in restrictive territory – that is, above the neutral (not inflationary nor disinflationary) policy rate, thought to be near 2.5%. Even still, the Fed effectively announced "last call" nine months ago – so why has the economic party continued? Milton Friedman famously noted the "long and variable lags" of monetary policy. Today those long lags are being further lengthened by the continued shift to a service economy (requires less investment capital and shows less interest rate sensitivity) and the large number of homeowners still enjoying 3% mortgages (and spending the saved money elsewhere).

Economic hangover? A potential problem with this is that the longer the economy resists the Fed's proverbial calls to go home, the more likely financial markets may regret it in the proverbial morning. Continued strong labor demand raises the specter of continued wage pressures (still stubbornly above 4% after mostly staying below 3% during the post-global financial crisis, pre-pandemic era). This, in turn, increases the risk of a sustained price-wage spiral (higher prices lead to higher wage demands that lead to even higher prices) and may force the Fed to refocus its inflation-fighting efforts. At present, the Fed is telegraphing two more rate hikes (though investors expect only one more hike) to 5.75% before an elongated pause. The longer the Fed must enforce restrictive policy, the greater the risk of eventual investment portfolio pain.

Portfolio painkillers. The "hair of the dog" outcome would be for labor supply relief (early AI job applications or late-to-the-party jobs entrants aiming to offset restarted student loan payments?) to sustain the economic expansion sans high inflation, paving the way for further equity market gains. Short of that outcome, a few portfolio painkillers may be in order. Natural resource equities and inflation-linked bonds can help with new inflationary risks – especially should those risks arise from oil or other commodity supply shocks (a growing risk in this new geopolitical climate). For those worried about volatility, high yield bonds (and their 8.5% yield) could offer a similar return to equity markets, but with historically lower risk.

SECOND QUARTER 2023 TOTAL RETURNS (%)

U.S. equities posted their best quarter since 2021 as the perceived odds of a soft landing increased.

	RISK CONTROL				RISK ASSETS							
	FIXED INCOME						EQUITIES			REAL ASSETS		
	Cash	Muni	Inv. Grade	TIPS	High Yield	EM Debt	U.S.	Dev. Ex-U.S.	EM	NR	GRE	GLI
2Q23	1.2	-0.1	-0.8	-1.4	1.8	2.5	8.4	2.9	1.8	-3.7	0.7	-0.1
YTD	2.3	2.7	2.1	1.9	5.4	7.8	16.4	10.9	5.8	-3.1	1.4	3.8

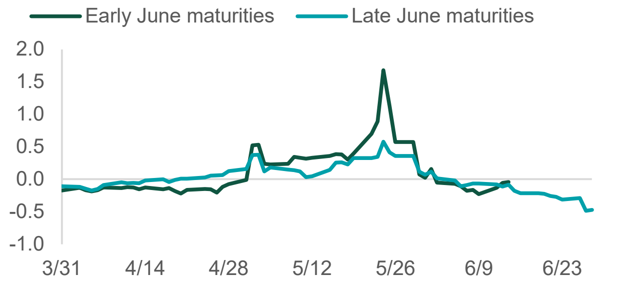
Source: Northern Trust Asset Management, Bloomberg. NR: Natural Resources; GRE: Global Real Estate; GLI: Global Listed Infrastructure. Indexes are gross of fees.

KEY DEVELOPMENTS

Debt Dislocations Resolved

Investors digested two major risks broadly related to debt in 2Q: the debt ceiling and bank sector stability. The former did not lead to much market concern other than in short-dated Treasury yields (see chart) – the "low-probability, high-impact" U.S. default risk case was removed after a deal in D.C. took the debt ceiling off the table until early 2025. The latter risk has also faded. While First Republic failed in early May, bank stress eased through May and June. The amelioration of both risks, overall, was supportive of equity markets.

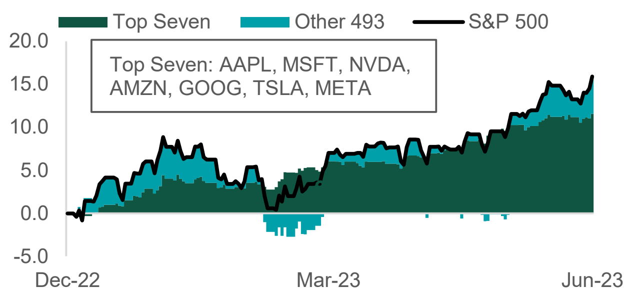
TREASURY BILL YIELDS MINUS FED FUNDS RATE (%)



Artificial Intelligence, Artificial Up Market?

AI saw heavy investor interest, leading to strong returns for large tech-related companies. An improved fundamental outlook helped these stocks outperform during a time of rising interest rates – often considered a headwind for the group. By late May, the S&P 500 was up ~10% year-to-date, but all of that gain was driven by the seven largest stocks and the contribution from the other companies was slightly negative. While the market gains broadened in June, the "Top Seven" continue to account for a majority of 2023's return.

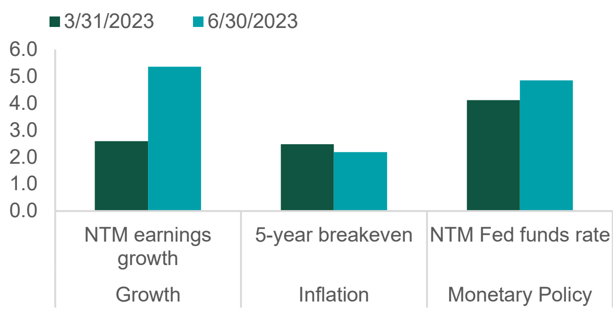
S&P 500 2023 RETURN BREAKDOWN (%)



Growing Soft Landing Hopes

Hopes of a soft landing remain as the U.S. growth outlook followed a narrative of continued resilience (via a solid labor market) with signs of softening. Inflation expectations dropped yet the pace and magnitude of the decline in core inflation remains a key question. Finally, investor Federal Reserve policy expectations moved up to reflect one (or two) more rate hikes beyond the current 5.1% level in addition to phasing out the possibility of a large rate cut – a sharply negative scenario that would not have been helpful for equities.

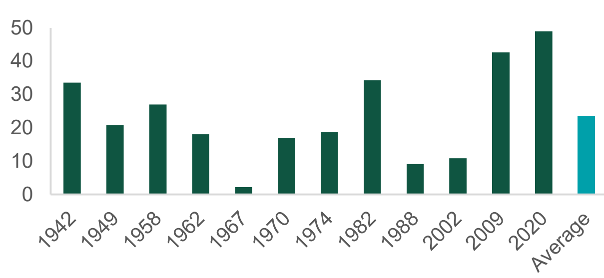
MARKET EXPECTATIONS AS OF… (%)



Can Bears Become Bulls?

The S&P 500 exited bear market territory on June 8 by a commonly used convention (20% off the low). The bear market stretched back to early January of 2022 with the low falling in mid-October. Equity returns have typically been positive in the year following the exit from a bear market. However, this time could be different as equity market rebounds have often been accompanied by a recovering economy and/or a reversal to a more-accommodative monetary policy stance – neither of which are particularly likely over the next 6-12 months.

1-YEAR RETURNS AFTER BEAR MARKET EXITS (%)



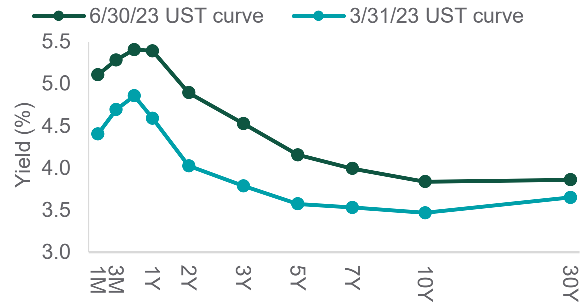
Source: Northern Trust Asset Management, Bloomberg. Data as of 6/30/2023. Note: early June (6/1 to 6/15); late June (6/16 to 6/30); NTM = next-twelve-months; Average goes back to 1940. Past performance is not indicative or a guarantee of future results. Index performance returns do not reflect any management fees, transaction costs or expenses. It is not possible to invest directly in any index.

MARKET REVIEW

Interest Rates

The U.S. debt ceiling was resolved with a short-lived and contained impact on Treasury yields. Meanwhile, the Fed decided to hold its policy rate in June, but the "pause" was more of a "skip" as it projected two more rate hikes this year. Disinflation was embraced, but core prices remain high while employment is still solid. The Fed was among a crowd of major global central banks, with China as a notable exception, suggesting more tightening needs to occur. The Treasury curve bear flattened with the 2-year yield up 87 basis points (bps).

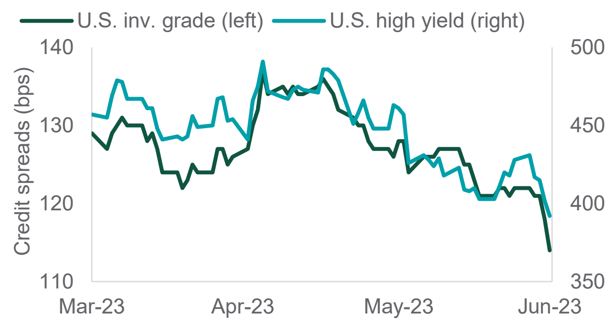
U.S. TREASURY YIELD CURVE



Credit Markets

After First Republic Bank entered receivership the banking system found its footing and credit spreads retraced almost all of the widening that had occurred since March due to regional bank strains. Investment grade (IG) and high yield (HY) spreads narrowed 15 and 65 bps, respectively, on the quarter. Default activity ticked up but stayed fairly benign and lower-quality credits outperformed. Credit risk was favorable to duration with the more interest rate-sensitive IG Fixed Income (-0.8%) trailing HY Fixed Income (+1.8%).

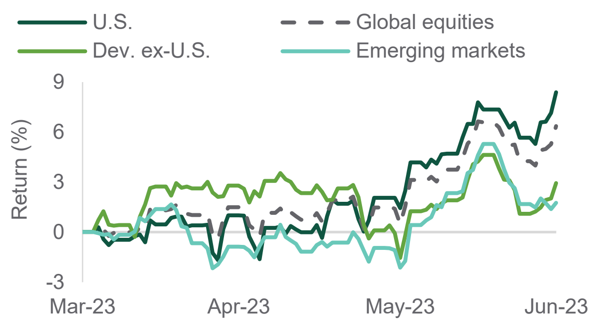
CREDIT SPREADS



Equities

It was a strong quarter for global equities (+6.4%). Declining inflation and upside economic surprises underpinned an 8.4% gain in the U.S., while optimism on artificial intelligence drove robust returns in a narrow set of mega cap tech stocks. Valuations offered most of the support, though for the first time in eight months forward earnings estimates increased. European equities were bogged down by economic recession and tight policy. China's slow recovery dragged on, but near the end of the quarter policymakers started to step in.

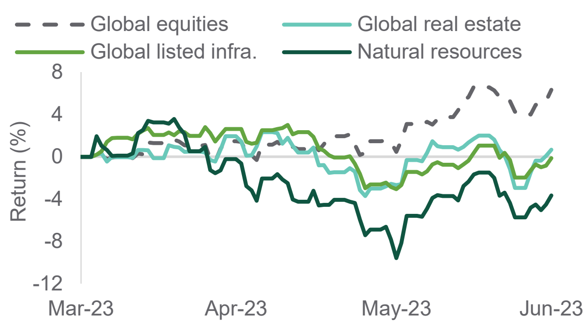
REGIONAL EQUITY INDICES



Real Assets

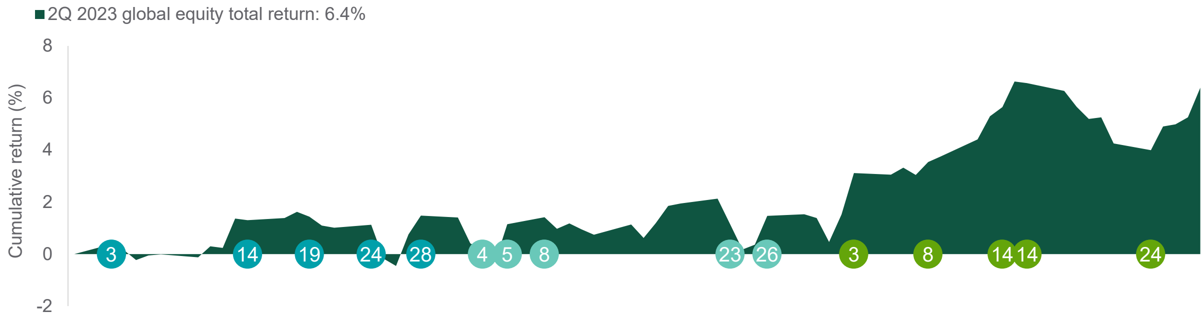
It was an underwhelming quarter for real assets as global real estate (+0.7%), listed infrastructure (-0.1%), and natural resources (-3.7%) lagged global equities. Higher interest rates were a headwind for real estate (RE) and infrastructure, but RE was helped by a more favorable credit backdrop and saw some improvement in lagging sectors like office. Global growth concerns continued to weigh on commodity prices with metals particularly soft on weak manufacturing activity. That said, late-quarter China stimulus offered some support.

REAL ASSET INDICES



Source: Bloomberg. Returns in U.S. dollars. Indexes are gross of fees. Past performance is not indicative or a guarantee of future results. Index performance returns do not reflect any management fees, transaction costs or expenses. It is not possible to invest directly in any index.

MARKET EVENTS



APRIL	MAY	JUNE
3 Oil prices increase following a surprise OPEC-plus announcement of a meaningful supply reduction.	**4** The European Central Bank (ECB) delivers a 25-basis point (bp) rate hike and indicates more are on the horizon.	**3** Markets price out U.S. default risks after Congress extends the debt ceiling past the 2024 Presidential Elections.
14 1Q23 earnings season unofficially begins; aggregate year-over-year (y/y) earnings growth finishes slightly negative but tops expectations of a larger decline.	**5** Regional bank stocks decline ~10% for the week, but the banking system proceeds to find its footing over the next several weeks as deposit outflows slow.	**8** The S&P 500 Index pushes into a new bull market after it crosses the 20% threshold above its October 2022 low.
19 U.K. inflation is notably hotter-than-expected, prompting an upward repricing of investor expectations for Bank of England policy tightening.	**8** Senior Loan Officer Opinion Survey shows that U.S. banks tightened lending standards and plan to continue to do so.	**14** The People's Bank of China cuts two of its key policy rates by 10 bps, a move that could signal a willingness to provide more support moving forward.
24 First Republic Bank (FRC) reveals steep deposit outflows and later becomes the third U.S. regional bank to fail since March, but a subsidized sale to JPMorgan helps contain broader fallout.	**23** Developed market Purchasing Managers' Index data shows services activity continues to expand, supporting growth but also pushing up investor expectations for central bank tightening.	**14** The Fed unanimously votes to hold its policy rate after 5% of cumulative tightening, but the updated Summary of Economic Projections indicates two more hikes to come in 2023.
28 U.S. core Personal Consumption Expenditures tops estimates at 4.6% y/y – a mere improvement from the prior level (4.7%).	**26** Artificial Intelligence (AI) optimism boosts Technology stocks, including a 20% weekly gain for NVIDIA (NVDA) after its AI projections drive a stunning increase in its revenue guidance.	**24** A deal between Russia President Putin and Wagner Group head Prigozhin ends Prigozhin's advance toward Moscow with little immediate impact but likely longer-term implications.

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