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Market Insights

A periodic newsletter from Idaho Trust Bank

Volatility in the global financial markets was very high last month. U.S. equities suffered a significant selloff in the final week of February. Most major stock indices have experienced a “correction” during the past month. The sharp market decline was driven by concerns around the spread of the COVID-19 virus and its impact on global economic activity. It is important to remember that these movements are a normal part of stock market activity.

An Increase in Volatility

The S&P 500 experienced almost a 13% decline from the all-time high, established on February 19th. This was the quickest correction – defined as a pullback of at least 10.0% – in stock market history, occurring in just six trading days (see chart on next page). The correction has been primarily driven by concerns around the spread of COVID-19 (also called the “Coronavirus”) and its impact on the global economy.

In early March, the Federal Reserve Bank (Fed) lowered its benchmark interest rate by 50 basis points, designed to help alleviate the potential economic disruptions from the Coronavirus. The target range of the Fed Funds rate is now 1.00%-1.25%. The move was unusual in that it occurred in between the Fed’s regularly scheduled meetings. The action marks the central bank’s first between

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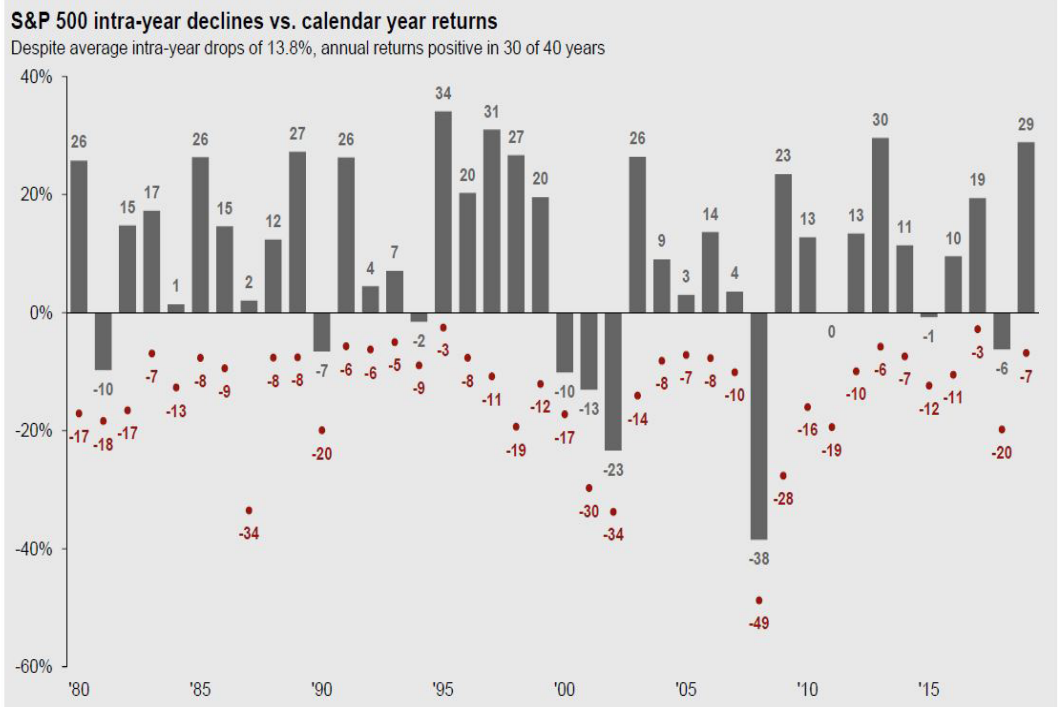
policy meetings since the 2008 financial crisis. In their brief statement accompanying the emergency policy action, the Fed noted that “the coronavirus poses evolving risks to economic activity.” The statement also



notes that “the fundamentals of the U.S. economy remain strong.”

Beginning in January and continuing into early February, the news surrounding COVID-19 was confined to China, where it began to impact the already weak Chinese economy and markets. Initially the rate of spread appeared “normal” and seemed to be contained to China.

Annual returns and intra-year declines GTM - U.S. | 13



Source: FactSet, Standard & Poor's, J.P. Morgan Asset Management. Returns are based on price index only and do not include dividends. Intra-year drops refers to the largest market drops from a peak to a trough during the year. For illustrative purposes only. Returns shown are calendar year returns from 1980 to 2019, over which time period the average annual return was 8.9%. Guide to the Markets – U.S. Data are as of December 31, 2019.

In recent weeks, however, the spread to other countries on most continents and the accelerated rate of growth in cases have led to increased concern regarding the global economy and risk that it could be the tipping point of economic recession and bear markets. The good news is that mortality associated with the coronavirus seems to have stabilized at a much lower rate than that of other recent widespread viral outbreaks, such as SARS or Ebola. In addition, it appears that cases in China are on the wane and everyday life, to some extent, is resuming.

The not-so-great news is that, because its symptoms are not as severe as those of SARS or Ebola, COVID-19 is much easier to spread, increasing the risk of transmission. More specifically, while the spread of the virus seems to have somewhat slowed in China, the real concern for markets is the pickup in cases outside of China. The increase of new cases in Europe as well as Asia and several Middle Eastern countries provides a significant downside risk to global economic growth during the first half of this year.

Stock Market Corrections

Most major equity markets are in the midst of a correction. The market declines are clearly a result of the unknown impact on economic growth.

Market downturns happen frequently but don't last forever
Standard & Poor's 500 Composite Index (1950-2019)

Size of decline	-5% or more	-10% or more	-15% or more	-20% or more
Average frequency*	About three times per year	About once per year	About once every four years	About once every six years
Average length†	43 days	112 days	262 days	401 days
Last occurrence	August 2019	December 2018	December 2018	December 2018

* Assumes 50% recovery of lost value.
† Measures market high to market low.

Sources: Capital Group, Standard & Poor's.

bar represents the annual return each year through 2019. The red dot below each bar shows the intra-year decline during that year. As you can clearly see from the data, market corrections occur every year. The average decline during the period from 1980 until 2019 was 13.8%. The above chart clearly shows that high single digit or low double digit declines are common in most years. In fact, the last major correction occurred in 2018 when the market fell by almost 20%.

Conclusion

At this point, the full economic impact of Coronavirus is unknown. Many Governments and companies have begun to curtail travel and trade in an attempt to mitigate the impact and spread of the virus. These actions should help contain the spread of the virus but will reduce earnings expectations in the near term.

S&P 500 Index

3 Month	-5.51%
Year-to-Date	-8.270%
1 Year	8.18%
3 Year	9.85%
5 Year	9.21%

MSCI EAFE Net Index

3 Month	-8.05%
Year-to-Date	-10.94%
1 Year	-0.57%
3 Year	3.92%
5 Year	1.96%

Barclays Aggregate Bond Index

3 Month	3.69%
Year-to-Date	3.76%
1 Year	11.68%
3 Year	5.01%
5 Year	3.57%

As of 2.29.2020

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