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Housing Pops; Rates Drop

Things were starting to look pretty scary for housing up until a few weeks ago. There was a chance that **some** of the weakness was temporary. Last week's strong Pending Home Sales report provided some hope, but we didn't have any other big housing reports to validate the hope... until now.

New Home Sales were as low as 549k at the end of 2018. This was well below the post-crisis trend of improvement. A strong number at the end of January had to be taken with a **grain of salt** because it pertained to November's sales, not to mention the fact that this data series is notoriously prone to revisions.

This week brought us December's New Home Sales data, and while there was a negative revision to that strong November number, it fell into a nice line leading back to the previous trend as seen in the chart below. Granted, we're just now back to the lower boundary of that growth trend, but things could definitely be worse.

In a separate report from the Census Bureau, **New Residential Construction** showed a similar uptick for Building Permits and Housing Starts (which refers to the breaking of ground on new construction).

National Average Mortgage Rates

	Rate	Change	Points
Mortgage News Daily			
30 Yr. Fixed	6.43%	+0.02	0.00
15 Yr. Fixed	5.95%	0.00	0.00
30 Yr. FHA	5.82%	+0.02	0.00
30 Yr. Jumbo	6.62%	0.00	0.00
5/1 ARM	6.28%	-0.01	0.00
Freddie Mac			
30 Yr. Fixed	6.35%	-0.51	0.00
15 Yr. Fixed	5.51%	-0.65	0.00

Rates as of: 8/30

Market Data

	Price / Yield	Change
MBS UMBS 5.0	99.37	+0.02
MBS GNMA 5.0	99.93	+0.02
10 YR Treasury	3.9068	+0.0029
30 YR Treasury	4.1960	+0.0028

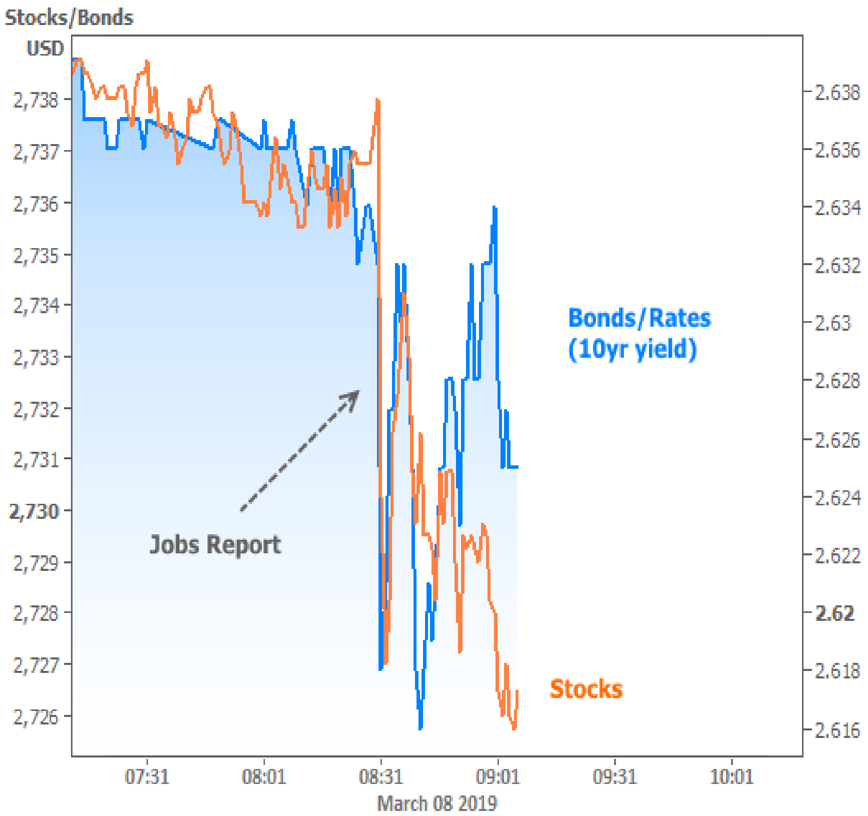
Pricing as of: 9/1 7:34PM EST

Recent Housing Data

		Value	Change
Mortgage Apps	Aug 28	226.9	+0.49%
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%

At least part of the equation for the housing slump and recovery has been interest rates. **Unlike** stocks, which have closed much of the gap to 2018 highs, rates remain near the **lowest levels** in more than a year. Part of the reason for this is a softening in economic data. A strong economy can support higher rates, so economic weakness tends to coincide with rates falling.

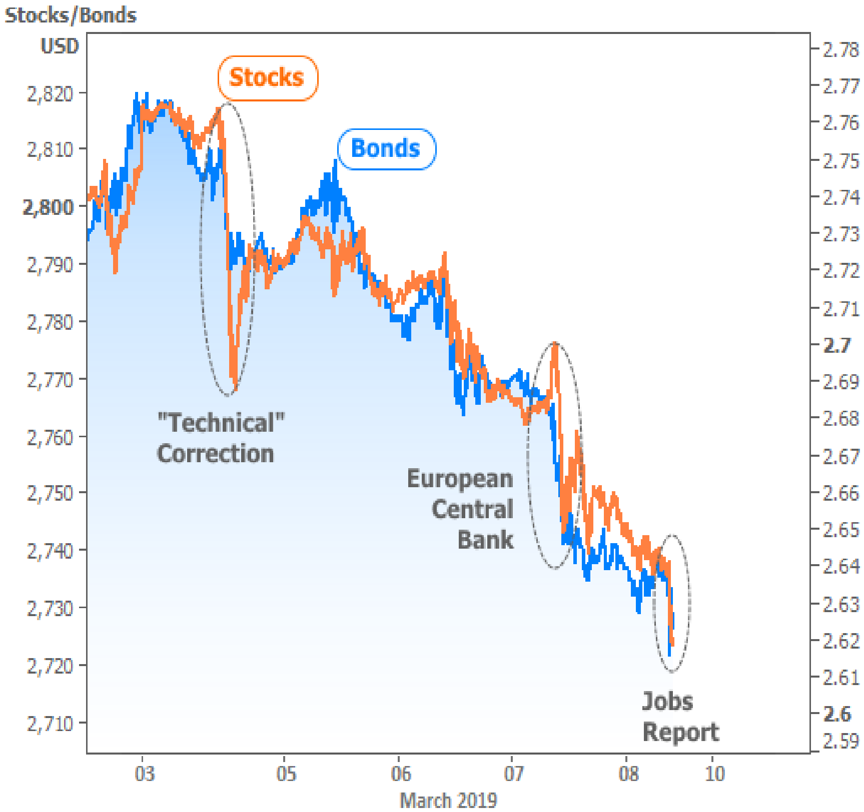
The Employment Situation (aka the "jobs report") is the most important piece of economic data as far as interest rates are concerned. When it's weaker than expected, rates tend to fall. Friday's jobs report was **incredibly weak!** Rates clearly should have fallen in response. They did exactly that at first, but paradoxically bounced higher as the morning continued.



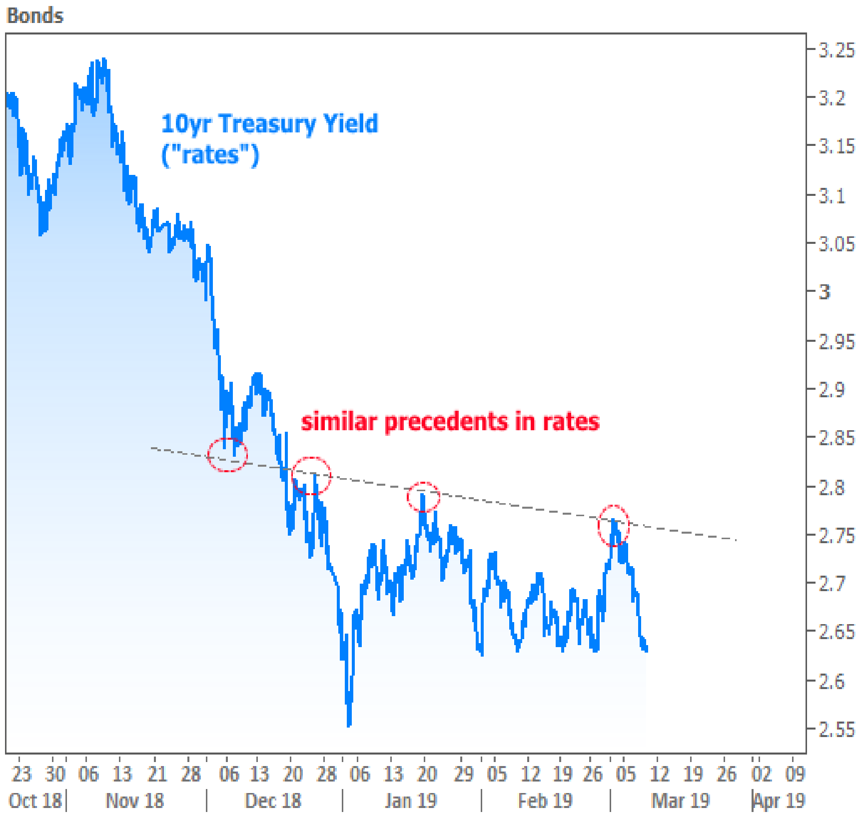
Stocks were included in the chart above to show the correlation that's frequently seen surrounding surprising economic data. Logically, bad economic news could prompt investors to sell stocks and buy bonds (**buying** bonds = lower rates). So why did some investors start **selling** bonds (pushing the blue line higher) even though stocks continued to fall?

It's a bit anticlimactic to consider, but rates may simply have had enough of a good thing for the week. Thank central banks for that!

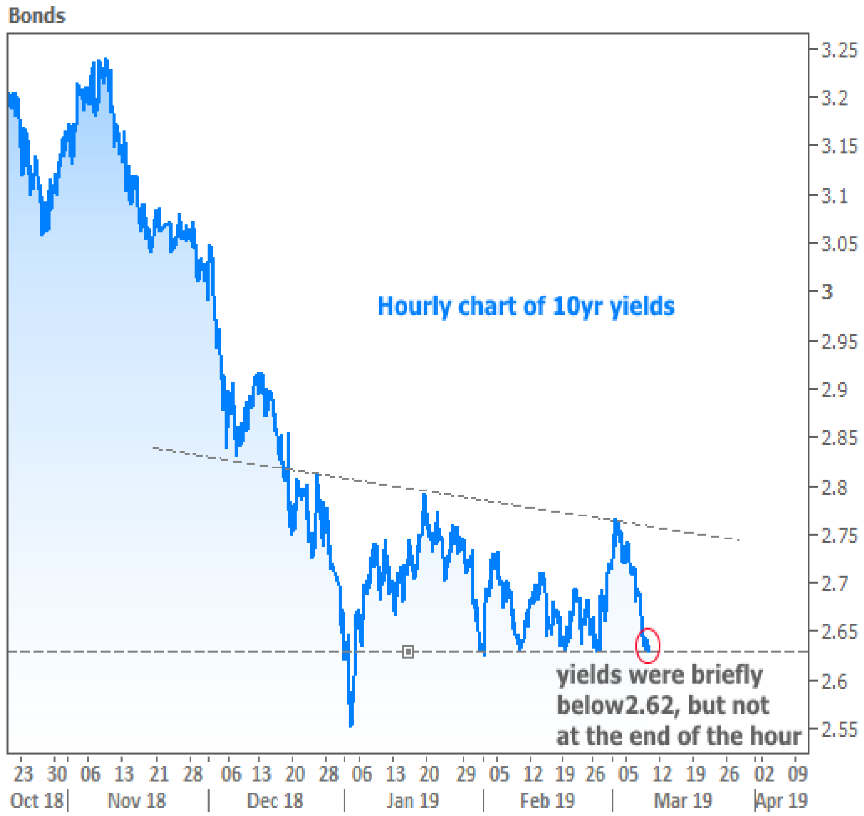
Economic data may paint a picture and suggest a logical range for interest rates, but more often than not, it's central bank policy changes that cause the bigger movements inside those ranges. Both the Fed and the ECB (European Central Bank) have been fairly friendly toward bonds/rates recently. This week, it was the ECB's turn. Thursday's ECB Announcement and press conference helped rates improve at their fastest pace of the week.



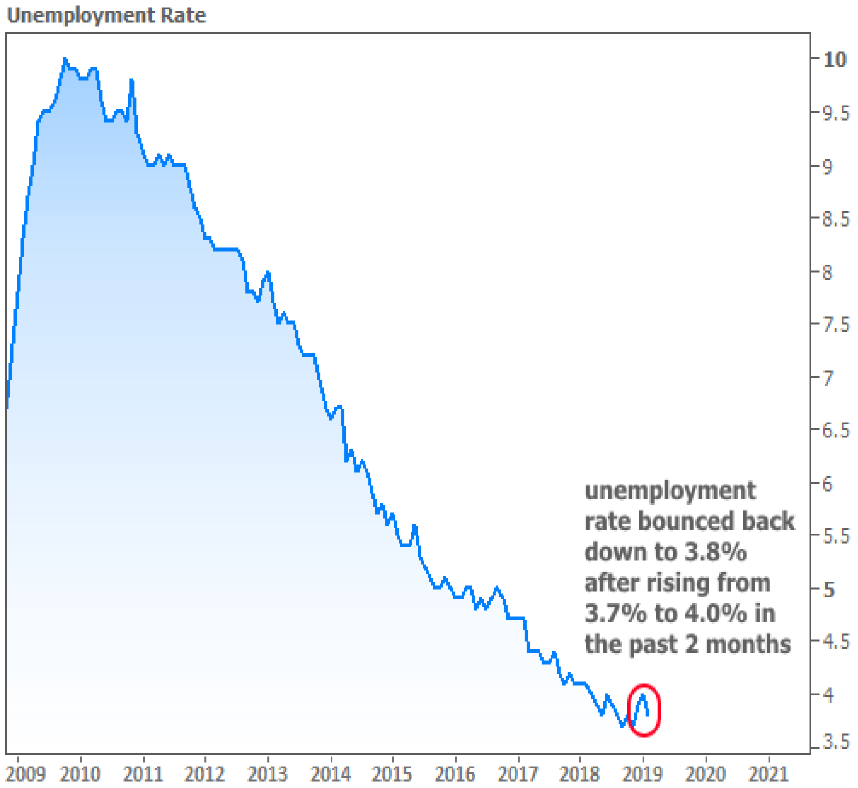
Notice the reference to a **"technical correction"** in the chart above. This refers to trading that disregards fundamental data/news/events and instead relies only on the chart patterns for decision making. For instance if stocks/rates hit a certain ceiling multiple times, investors might assume another bounce will result in a similar amount of movement. As a result, they may trade in the implied direction as soon as it looks like other traders are doing the same thing. This likely contributed to ceilings in stock prices and bond yields ("rates") early this week.

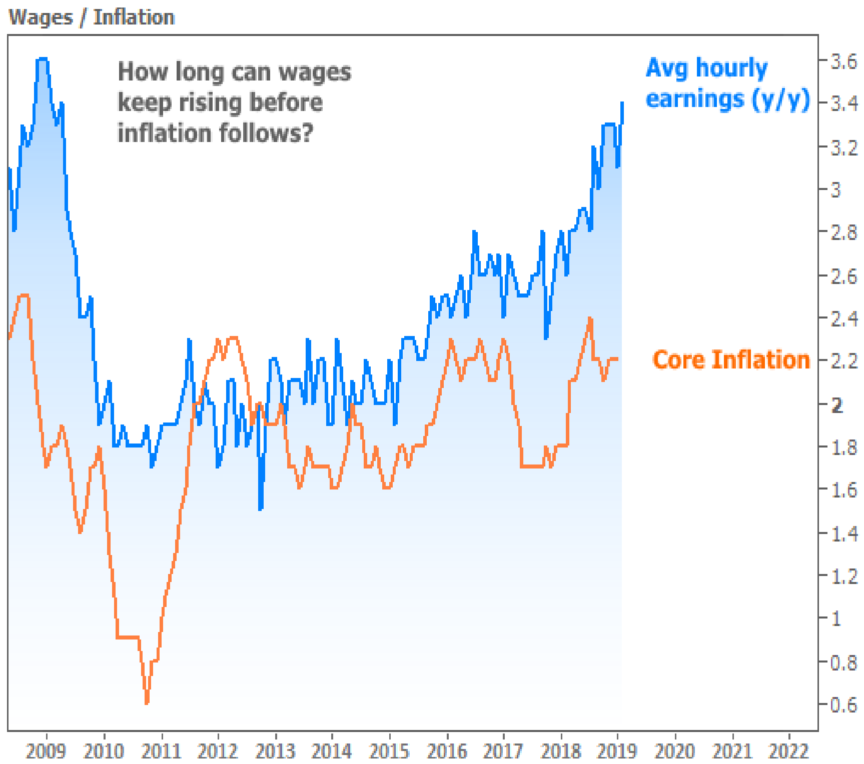


Just like there are technical ceilings, we also frequently see technical **floors**. To bring the discussion full circle, we could also argue that rates **resisted** a bigger move lower after the jobs report because it would have meant breaking below such a floor.



Despite the evidence for technical resistance, not everyone will be satisfied with that explanation. In their defense, it really is **a lot to ask** to believe chart patterns caused rates to ignore such a huge drop in the jobs count. For those left with raised eyebrows, consider the internal components of the jobs report. Not only did the **unemployment rate** fall back to 3.8%, but wage growth rose to another **post-crisis high**. Inflation may not be a huge concern at the moment, but investors will increasingly have to ask themselves how much higher wages can go without inflation eventually being pulled higher (higher inflation puts upward pressure on rates).





We won't get any more central bank **bombshells** in the week ahead, but that's only because the Fed is in a communications blackout in advance of its next big policy announcement in the following week. We will, however, get another round of fairly important economic data, and we've been looking toward this mid-March time frame for investors to become more willing to react to the data after taking things with a grain of salt surrounding the government shutdown. **Bottom line:** rate volatility could just be getting started.

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Recent Economic Data

Date	Event	Actual	Forecast	Prior
Monday, Mar 04				
10:00AM	Dec Construction spending (%)	-0.6	0.2	0.8
Tuesday, Mar 05				
10:00AM	Feb ISM N-Mfg PMI	59.7	57.3	56.7
10:00AM	Dec New home sales-units mm (ml)	0.621	0.600	0.657
10:00AM	Dec New home sales chg mm (%)	+3.7	-8.7	16.9
Wednesday, Mar 06				
7:00AM	w/e MBA Purchase Index	240.5		247.0
7:00AM	w/e Mortgage Refinance Index	1110.9		1133.8
8:15AM	Feb ADP National Employment (k)	183	189	213
Thursday, Mar 07				
8:30AM	w/e Jobless Claims (k)	223	225	225
Friday, Mar 08				
8:30AM	Feb Average earnings mm (%)	0.4	0.3	0.1
8:30AM	Feb Non-farm payrolls (k)	20	180	304
8:30AM	Feb Unemployment rate mm (%)	3.8	3.9	4.0
8:30AM	Jan Building permits: number (ml)	1.345	1.289	1.326
8:30AM	Jan Build permits: change mm (%)	1.4		0.3
8:30AM	Jan House starts mm: change (%)	+18.6		-11.2
8:30AM	Jan Housing starts number mm (ml)	1.230	1.197	1.078
Monday, Mar 11				
8:30AM	Jan Retail Sales (%)	0.2	0.0	-1.2
Tuesday, Mar 12				
8:30AM	Feb Core CPI (Annual) (%)	+2.1	2.2	2.2
Wednesday, Mar 13				
7:00AM	w/e Mortgage Refinance Index	1108.3		1110.9
7:00AM	w/e MBA Purchase Index	250.8		240.5
8:30AM	Jan Durable goods (%)	0.4	-0.5	1.2
8:30AM	Jan Nondefense ex-air (%)	0.8	0.1	-1.0
8:30AM	Feb Core Producer Prices YY (%)	+2.5	2.6	2.6
Thursday, Mar 14				
8:30AM	w/e Jobless Claims (k)	229	225	223
Friday, Mar 15				
9:15AM	Feb Industrial Production (%)	0.1	0.4	-0.6
10:00AM	Mar 1yr Inflation Outlook (%)	2.4		2.6

Event Importance:

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

Date	Event	Actual	Forecast	Prior
10:00AM	Mar 5yr Inflation Outlook (%)	2.5		2.3
10:00AM	Mar Consumer Sentiment	97.8	95.3	93.8
Wednesday, Apr 10				
1:00PM	10-yr Note Auction (bl)	24		
Thursday, Apr 11				
1:00PM	30-Yr Bond Auction (bl)	16		

Responsive service, experienced expertise

I've dedicated my 22 year mortgage career to client education, superior service, and honest answers. The lending landscape has changed dramatically the past few years, and continues to do so. My job is to ensure client partners' loans close quickly, without surprises, and I take that responsibility very seriously. Referrals are a responsibility I appreciate; they're a measure of trust, and that trust must be earned every day, on every referral.

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