INVESTMENT COUNSEL AND MANAGEMENT

FOMC Meeting Update

. . . as summarized by Smith Shellnut Wilson

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Federal Reserve officials, meeting for the first time under Chairman Jerome Powell, raised the benchmark lending rate a quarter-point and forecast a steeper path of hikes in 2019 and 2020, citing an improving economic outlook. Policy makers continued to project a total of three increases this year.

The vote to lift the federal funds rate target range to 1.5% to 1.75% was a unanimous 8-0.

The latest set of quarterly forecasts showed that policy makers were divided over the outlook for the benchmark interest rate in 2018. Seven officials projected at least four quarter-point hikes would be appropriate this year, while eight expected three or few increases to be warranted.

U.S. central bankers projected a median federal funds rate of 2.9% by the end of 2019, implying three rate increases next year, compared with two 2019 moves seen in the last round of forecasts in December. They saw rates at 3.4% in 2020, up from 3.1% in December, according to the median estimate.

The median estimate for economic growth this year rose to 2.7% from 2.5% in December, signaling confidence in U.S. consumers despite recent weak readings on retail sales that have pushed down tracking estimates of first-quarter 2018 activity.

The Committee’s forecast for the long-run sustainable growth rate of the economy was unchanged at 1.8%, suggesting policy makers are still skeptical of the effect of tax cuts on the economy’s capacity growth. The 2020 gross domestic product growth median projection was also unchanged at 2%.

Attached is a side-by-side comparison of the U.S. Federal Open Market Committee statements from Mar. 21, 2018 and Jan. 31, 2018.

Source for the information in this update is Bloomberg News

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FOMC STATEMENTS: SIDE-BY-SIDE

March 21, 2018

Information received since the Federal Open Market Committee met in January indicates that the labor market has continued to strengthen and that economic activity has been rising at a moderate rate. Job gains have been strong in recent months, and the unemployment rate has stayed low. Recent data suggest that growth rates of household spending and business fixed investment have moderated from their strong fourth-quarter readings. On a 12-month basis, both overall inflation and inflation for items other than food and energy have continued to run below 2 percent. Market-based measures of inflation compensation have increased in recent months but remain low; survey-based measures of longer-term inflation expectations are little changed, on balance.

Consistent with its statutory mandate, the Committee seeks to foster maximum employment and price stability. The economic outlook has strengthened in recent months. The Committee expects that, with further gradual adjustments in the stance of monetary policy, economic activity will expand at a moderate pace in the medium term and labor market conditions will remain strong. Inflation on a 12-month basis is expected to move up in coming months and to stabilize around the Committee's 2 percent objective over the medium term. Near-term risks to the economic outlook appear roughly balanced, but the Committee is monitoring inflation developments closely.

In view of realized and expected labor market conditions and inflation, the Committee decided to raise the target range for the federal funds rate to 1-1/2 to 1-3/4 percent. The stance of monetary policy remains accommodative, thereby supporting strong labor market conditions and a sustained return to 2 percent inflation.

In determining the timing and size of future adjustments to the target range for the federal funds rate, the Committee will assess realized and expected economic conditions relative to its objectives of maximum employment and 2 percent inflation. This assessment will take into account a wide range of information, including measures of labor market conditions, indicators of inflation pressures and inflation expectations, and readings on financial and international developments. The Committee will carefully monitor actual and expected inflation developments relative to its symmetric inflation goal. The Committee expects that economic conditions will evolve in a manner that will warrant further gradual increases in the federal funds rate; the federal funds rate is likely to remain, for some time, below levels that are expected to prevail in the longer run. However, the actual path of the federal funds rate will depend on the economic outlook as informed by incoming data.

Voting for the FOMC monetary policy action were Jerome H. Powell, Chairman; William C. Dudley, Vice Chairman; Thomas I. Barkin; Raphael W. Bostic; Lael Brainard; Loretta J. Mester; Randal K. Quarles; and John C. Williams.

Jan. 31, 2018

Information received since the Federal Open Market Committee met in December indicates that the labor market has continued to strengthen and that economic activity has been rising at a solid rate. Gains in employment, household spending, and business fixed investment have been solid, and the unemployment rate has stayed low. On a 12-month basis, both overall inflation and inflation for items other than food and energy have continued to run below 2 percent. Market-based measures of inflation compensation have increased in recent months but remain low; survey-based measures of longer-term inflation expectations are little changed, on balance.

Consistent with its statutory mandate, the Committee seeks to foster maximum employment and price stability. The Committee expects that, with further gradual adjustments in the stance of monetary policy, economic activity will expand at a moderate pace and labor market conditions will remain strong. Inflation on a 12-month basis is expected to move up this year and to stabilize around the Committee's 2 percent objective over the medium term. Near-term risks to the economic outlook appear roughly balanced, but the Committee is monitoring inflation developments closely.

In view of realized and expected labor market conditions and inflation, the Committee decided to maintain the target range for the federal funds rate at 1-1/4 to 1-1/2 percent. The stance of monetary policy remains accommodative, thereby supporting strong labor market conditions and a sustained return to 2 percent inflation.

In determining the timing and size of future adjustments to the target range for the federal funds rate, the Committee will assess realized and expected economic conditions relative to its objectives of maximum employment and 2 percent inflation. This assessment will take into account a wide range of information, including measures of labor market conditions, indicators of inflation pressures and inflation expectations, and readings on financial and international developments. The Committee will carefully monitor actual and expected inflation developments relative to its symmetric inflation goal. The Committee expects that economic conditions will evolve in a manner that will warrant further gradual increases in the federal funds rate; the federal funds rate is likely to remain, for some time, below levels that are expected to prevail in the longer run. However, the actual path of the federal funds rate will depend on the economic outlook as informed by incoming data.

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