

Can Powell take back the narrative?

What to watch next week when the U.S. Federal Reserve decides on another interest rate hike, from James Camp, CFA, Managing Director of Fixed Income and Strategic Income at Eagle Asset Management:

- Fed Chairman Jerome Powell is going to have to assert some leadership on the path of policy going forward. The hawkish pivots and talk around even more aggressive hikes are unsettling to the market.
- We expect three 50-basis point (bp) moves through July.
- Powell needs to lay out inflation expectations clearly. That's because mathematically (due to base effects) and practically speaking, inflation is likely peaking. So the Fed needs to focus markets on the pace of the expected path towards "stability." For example, is 3% inflation acceptable or do we need the 2% average level that is the Fed's official target?
- We expect rate hikes to be front-loaded, pushing the federal funds rate to 2.5%-2.75% by year's end, with a pause to see how labor dynamics and inflation evolve from there.
- While the strike price of the "Fed put" for equity markets and risk assets is much lower, the Fed may need to pause and evaluate before year end if financial conditions deteriorate too quickly and too much on account of slowing growth, which we are watching very carefully.
- Since the last meeting, former and current Fed officials have talked about equity market corrections as desirable to curb aggregate demand and even more aggressive rate hikes.
- This is leading to high levels of cross-asset volatility.
- Financial conditions are already tightening, and economic and geopolitical uncertainty are high. Thus Powell needs to explain the "stepped up but gradual rate hikes" versus the more aggressive 75-bp or higher increases advocated by some.
- In summary, Powell needs to take back control of the narrative on rate guidance and outlook.

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About James Camp, CFA

- 33 years of industry experience
- Joined Eagle Asset Management in 1997
- B.S., engineering science, Vanderbilt University, M.B.A., finance, Emory University
- Earned Chartered Financial Analyst designation in 1993

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of a fixed-income portfolio. The two most prominent factors are interest-rate movements and the creditworthiness of the bond issuer. Bonds issued by the U.S. government have significantly less risk of default than those issued by corporations and municipalities. However, the overall return on government bonds tends to be less than these other types of fixed-income securities. Investors should pay careful attention to the types of fixed-income securities that comprise their portfolio and remember that, as with all investments, there is the risk of the loss of capital.

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Hawkish, dovish, and centrist are terms used to describe the monetary policy preferences of central bankers and others. Hawks prioritize controlling inflation and may favor raising interest rates to reduce it or keep it in check. Doves tend to support maintaining lower interest rates, often in support of stimulating job growth and the economy more generally. Centrists tend to occupy the middle of the continuum between tight (hawkish) and loose (dovish) monetary policy.

Basis points (bps) are measurements used in discussions of interest rates and other percentages in finance. One basis point is equal to 1/100th of 1%, or 0.01%.

The federal funds rate is the target interest rate set by the Federal Open Market Committee of the U.S. Federal reserve. The target is the Fed's suggested rate for commercial banks to borrow and lend their excess reserves to each other overnight.

The term "Fed put" is an adaption of the option term "put," and it describes the belief among market participants that the U.S. Federal Reserve would step in and implement policies to limit the equity market's decline beyond a certain point.

A strike price is a term used generally in reference to derivative contracts such as put options. Put options are financial contracts that give the buyer of the option the right, but not the obligation, to sell a specified amount of a stock, bond, commodity, or other instrument at a pre-determined price (the "strike price") within a specified time frame. Put options increase in value as the price of the underlying asset falls, as the volatility in the price of the underlying asset increases, or as interest rates decline.

To learn more about Eagle Asset Management:
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