

# MERK® | RESEARCH

## Fed Chart Book

June 2018

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## Fed's Dual Mandate

### Established Objectives of Federal Reserve Monetary Policy:

**Stable Prices** ("Price Stability"): 2 percent inflation rate as measured by the annual change in the price index for personal consumption expenditures (PCE). The Powell Fed views the core (excluding food and energy) PCE as a better indication of future inflation. It is worth noting that the Fed interprets the inflation objective as symmetric, meaning they are trying to prevent persistent deviations, either above or below, from their 2 percent inflation target.

**Maximum Employment:** The highest utilization of labor resources that is sustainable over time (often estimated as the "natural rate of unemployment" or the "non-accelerating inflation rate of unemployment" (NAIRU)). As Powell likes to point out, the unemployment rate that is consistent with maximum employment is largely determined by nonmonetary factors (i.e., not heavily influenced by Fed policy). The Fed has no fixed goal for this rate, the current longer run estimate for unemployment is 4.5%, from the March 2018 Fed Summary of Economic Projections

## Fed Policy Tools

**Federal Funds Rate:** the primary policy tool of the Fed, it is the overnight benchmark interest rate. The Powell Fed aims for this rate to be at the estimated normal longer-run level when the policy objectives are met (i.e., inflation is running at the target rate of 2% and the economy is operating at maximum employment)

**Fed Balance Sheet:** Quantitative Easing ("QE") is Fed balance sheet expansion via bond purchases using "printed money," Quantitative Tightening ("QT") is essentially the opposite: Fed balance sheet contraction via allowing bonds to mature without reinvesting the proceeds.

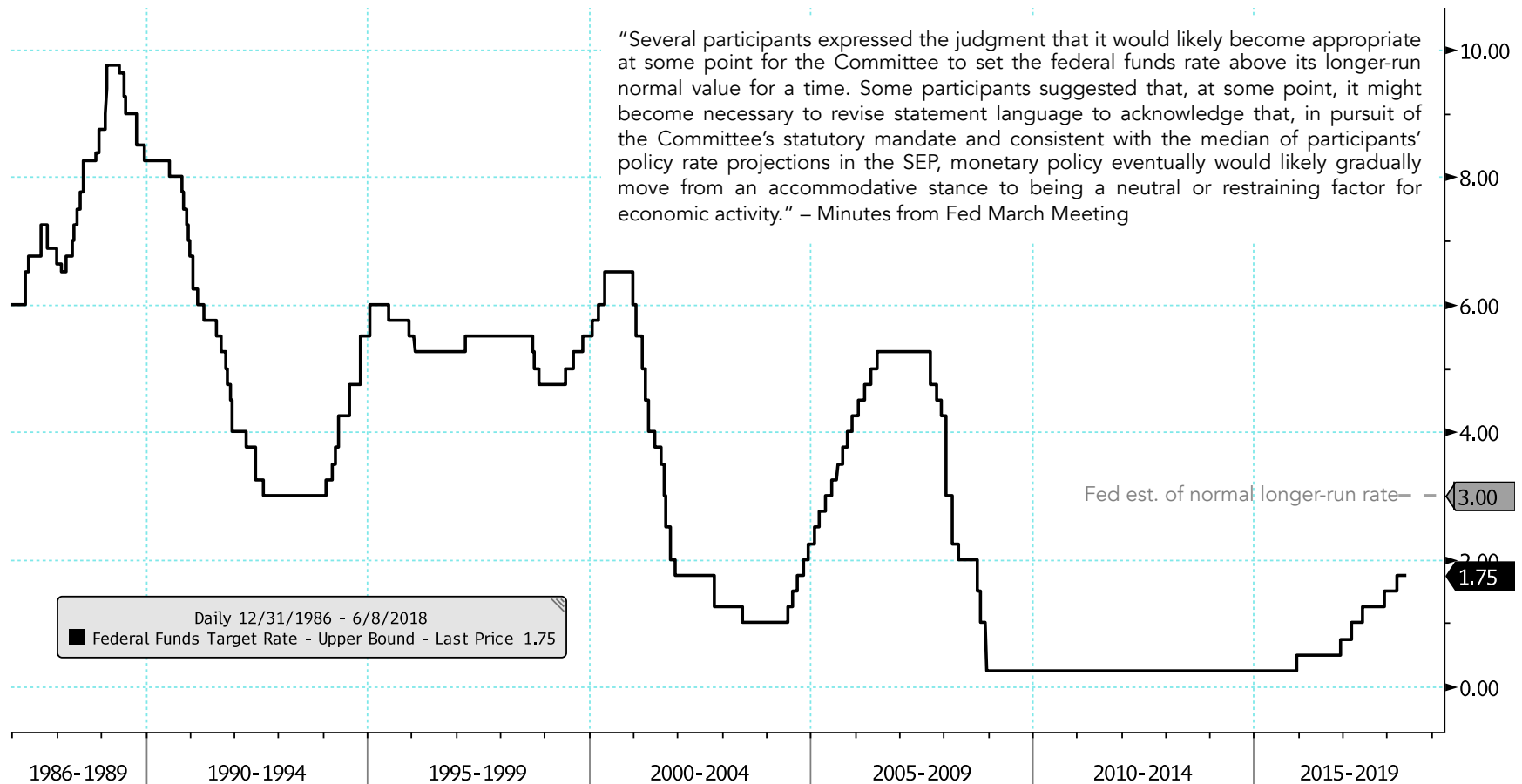
**Forward Guidance:** a commitment to hold rates at a certain level (e.g., zero) over a certain period of time

## Fed Key Concepts

**Data Dependency:** The Fed describes its policy making process as data dependent, which might be best summarized by Chair Powell's words: "Our views about appropriate monetary policy in the months and years ahead will be informed by incoming economic data and the evolving outlook. If the outlook changes, so too will monetary policy." Many of the following charts represent the relevant data followed by the Fed, and specifically by Chair Powell.

## Fed Estimate of Normal Longer-run Rate

The summary of economic projections from the March 2018 Fed meeting show a median longer-run projection of 3.00%



Source: Bloomberg, © Merk Investments LLC

*Analysis: Powell views the current gradual rate hikes as a process of removing accommodation, not as tightening per se. If the Fed were to hike rates to what they determine to be the normal longer run rate (currently estimated at 3.00%), that would represent a neutral monetary policy, and anything above the normal longer-run rate estimate would represent restrictive monetary policy. Powell's view is that gradually reducing monetary policy accommodation will sustain a strong labor market (consistent with the maximum employment mandate) while fostering a return of inflation to 2 percent on a sustained basis (consistent with the price stability mandate). Gradual seems to mean about three 25 basis point rate hikes per year, dependent on the incoming data continuing to suggest that inflation is trending up and the labor market remains strong.*

## Market Expectations of Fed Funds Rate in 1 year

What's Priced-in based on the +1-year Fed Funds Futures contract



Source: Bloomberg, © Merk Investments LLC

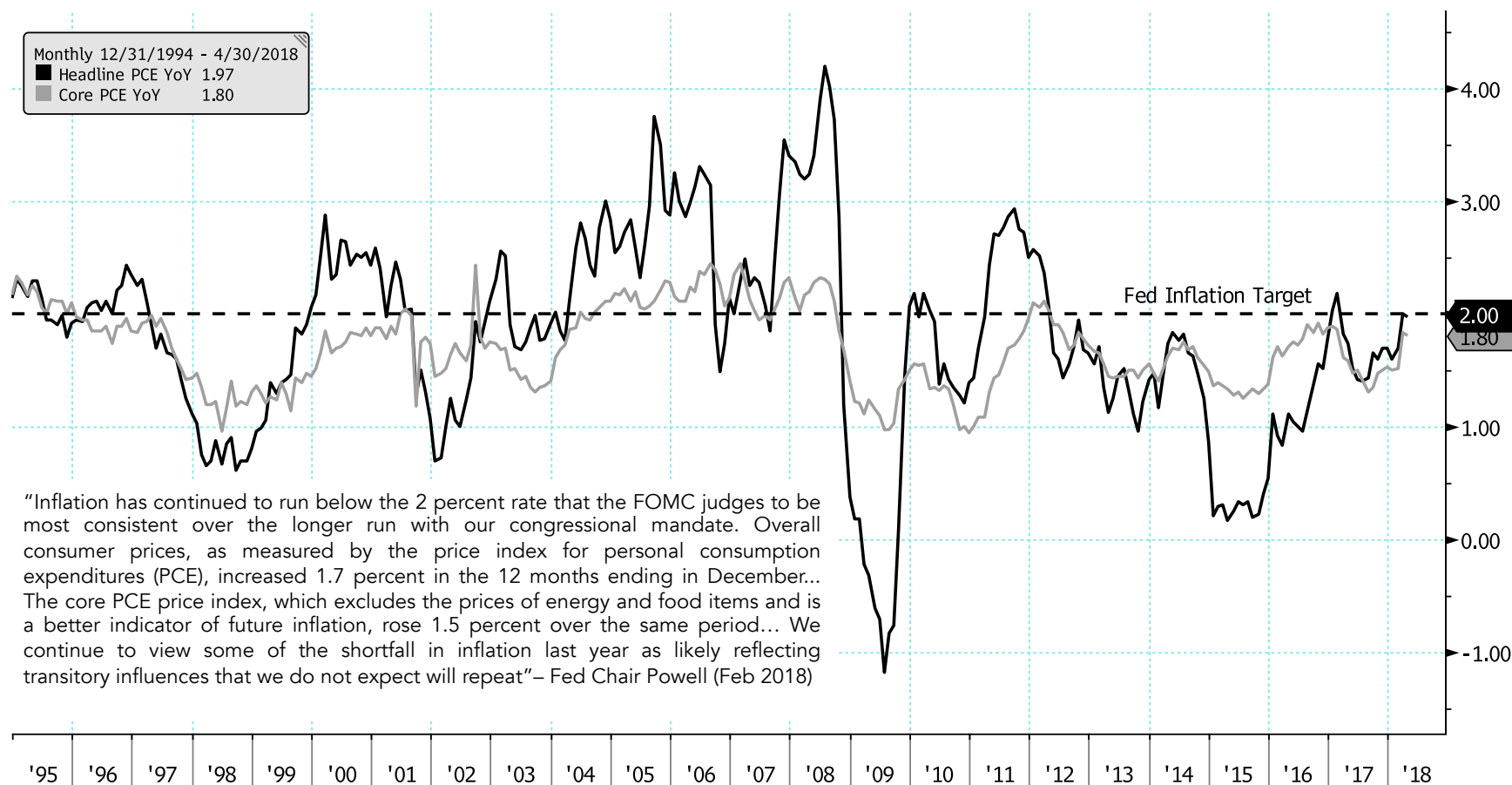
*Analysis: The market is pricing the Federal Funds rate in 1 years time at 2.42%.*

*There was recently some volatility (sharp dip) around Italian political concerns.*

*(Fed funds futures are priced on the effective rate which is between the upper and lower bounds of the target range, the current Fed funds target midpoint is at 1.625% (between 1.50 and 1.75))*

## Inflation Readings

The Headline and Core (excluding volatile food and energy prices) Personal Consumption Expenditures Index YoY Seasonally Adjusted (SA)



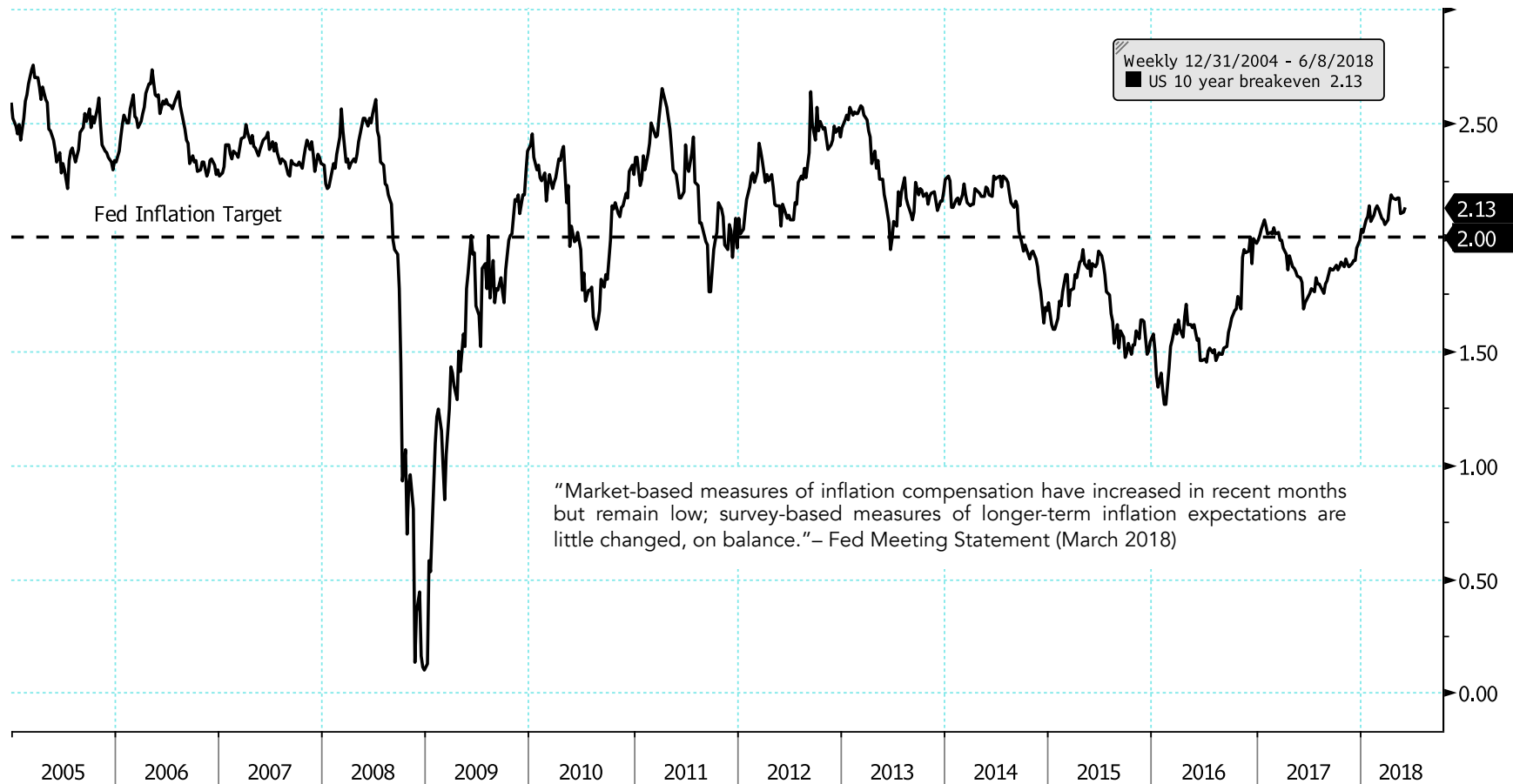
Source: Bloomberg, © Merk Investments LLC

*Analysis: The Fed expects PCE YoY to run at around 2% in 2019 and 2020 according to the Fed's latest Summary of Economic Projections. The April PCE data shows the headline inflation rate at 1.97%, near the target of 2%*

*\*This chart relates to the price stability mandate\**

## Inflation Expectations

10-year "breakeven" basically means the inflation rate that is implied by 10 year Treasury Inflation Protected Securities (TIPS)



Source: Bloomberg, © Merk Investments LLC

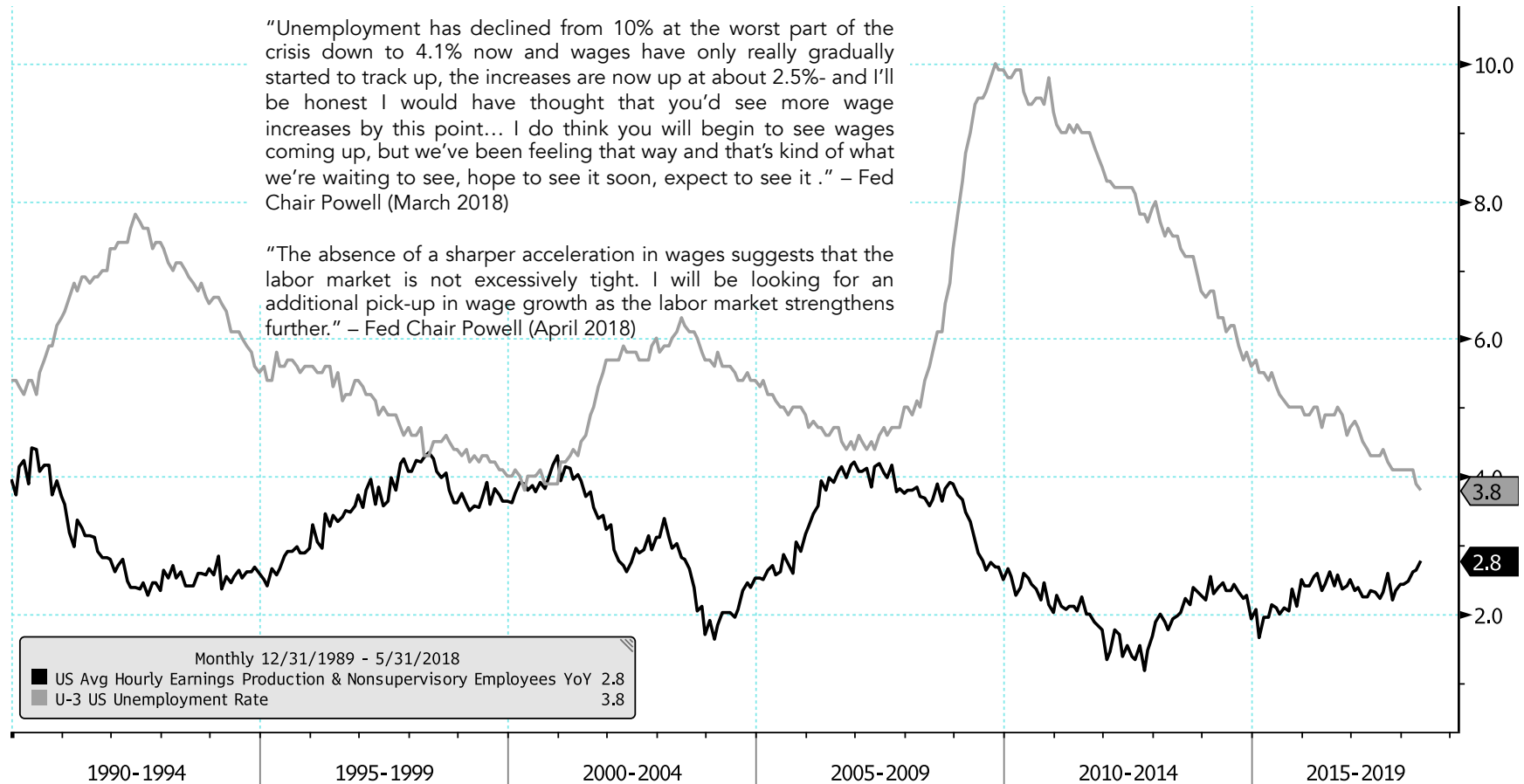
*Analysis: The market is suggesting average annual inflation over the next 10 years might be around 2.13%, based on the TIPS. This is considered a market-based measure, the Fed also looks at other market-based measures as well as survey-based measures.*

*See the Merk Research Inflation Chart Book more on our inflation outlook*

*\*This chart relates to the price stability mandate\**

## Unemployment Rate and Wages

The relationship between the unemployment rate and wages is referred to as the “Phillips Curve”



Source: Bloomberg, © Merk Investments LLC

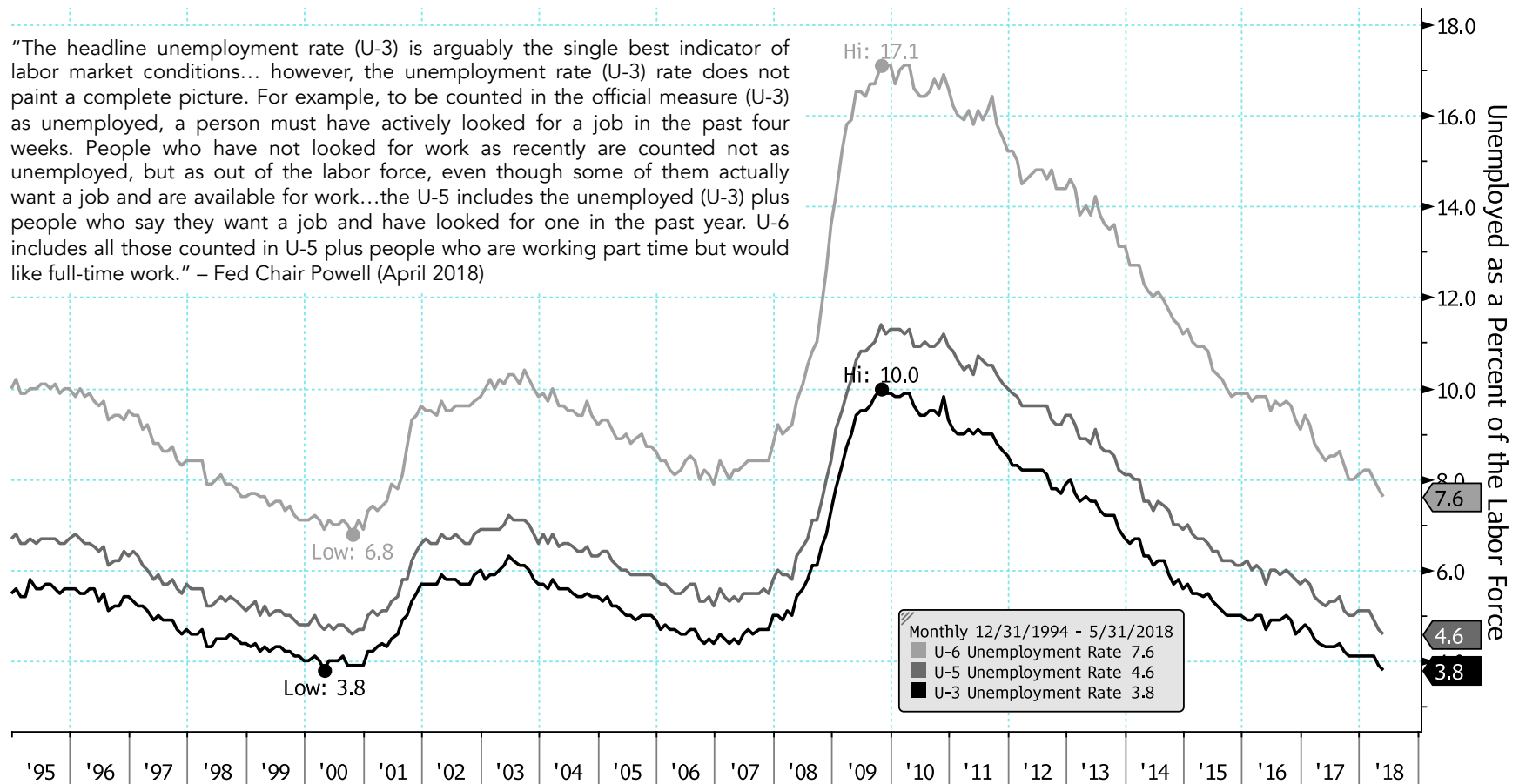
*Analysis: Fed policy makers have been surprised by the lack of wage inflation (and general inflation) in recent years I think in Powell's mind that suggests the labor market might not be at maximum employment yet. Having said that he was looking for an uptick and may have just gotten it with the last reading from the May jobs report.*

*\*This chart relates to both the price stability mandate and the maximum employment mandate\**

## Unemployment Rate Measures

U-3, U-5, U-6 Unemployment Rates

"The headline unemployment rate (U-3) is arguably the single best indicator of labor market conditions... however, the unemployment rate (U-3) rate does not paint a complete picture. For example, to be counted in the official measure (U-3) as unemployed, a person must have actively looked for a job in the past four weeks. People who have not looked for work as recently are counted not as unemployed, but as out of the labor force, even though some of them actually want a job and are available for work...the U-5 includes the unemployed (U-3) plus people who say they want a job and have looked for one in the past year. U-6 includes all those counted in U-5 plus people who are working part time but would like full-time work." – Fed Chair Powell (April 2018)



Source: Bloomberg, © Merk Investments LLC

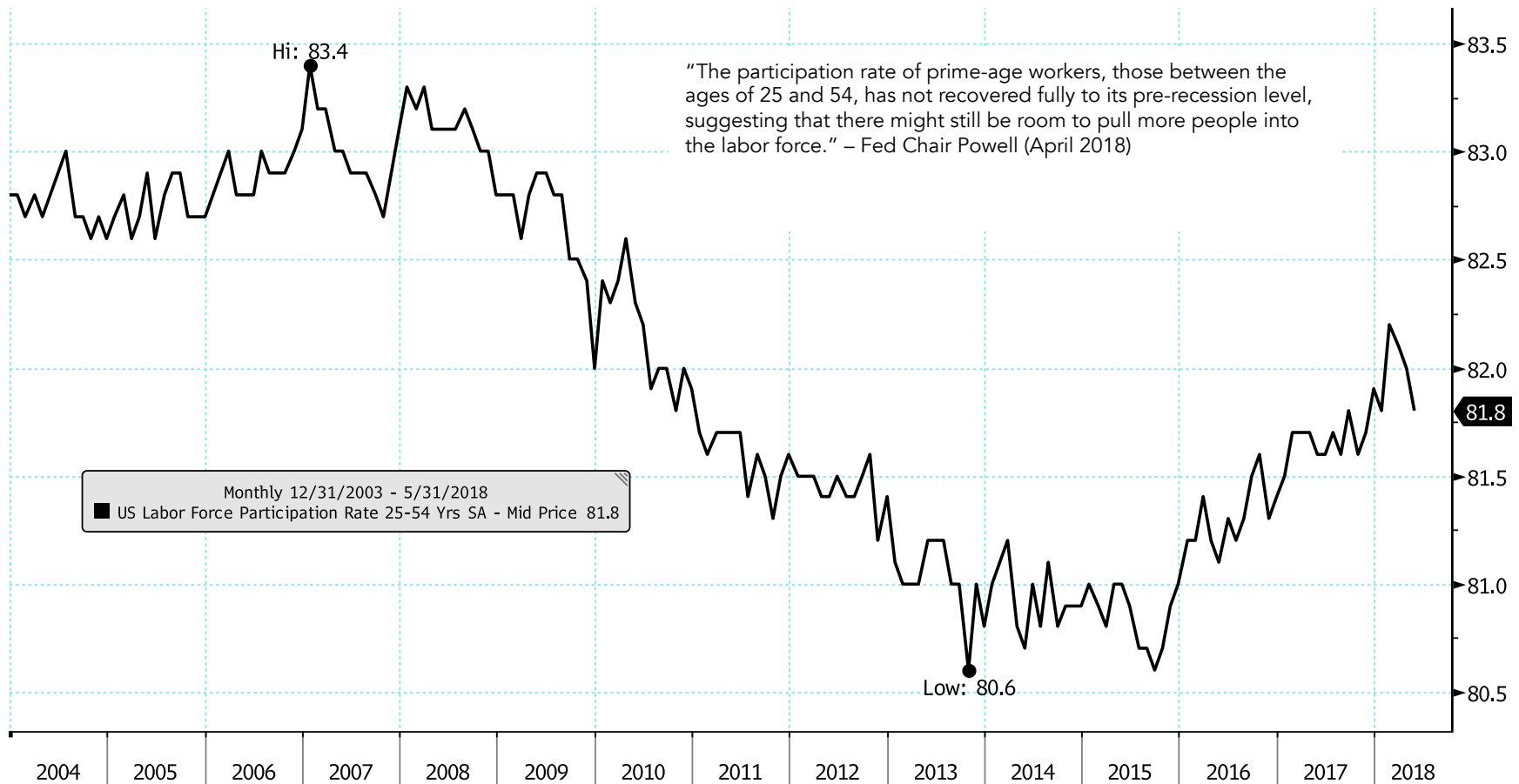
*Analysis: The U-3 rate is now tied with the 2000 low, with the U-6 rate still 0.9% above the 2000 low I think in Powell's mind that suggests the labor market might not quite be at maximum employment yet*

*\*This chart relates to the maximum employment mandate\**



## Prime-age (25-54) Labor Force Participation Rate

The labor force is the percent of the population that is either working or actively looking for work, in this case between the ages of 25-54



Source: Bloomberg, © Merk Investments LLC

*Analysis: The prime-age participation rate is below the previous cycle high*

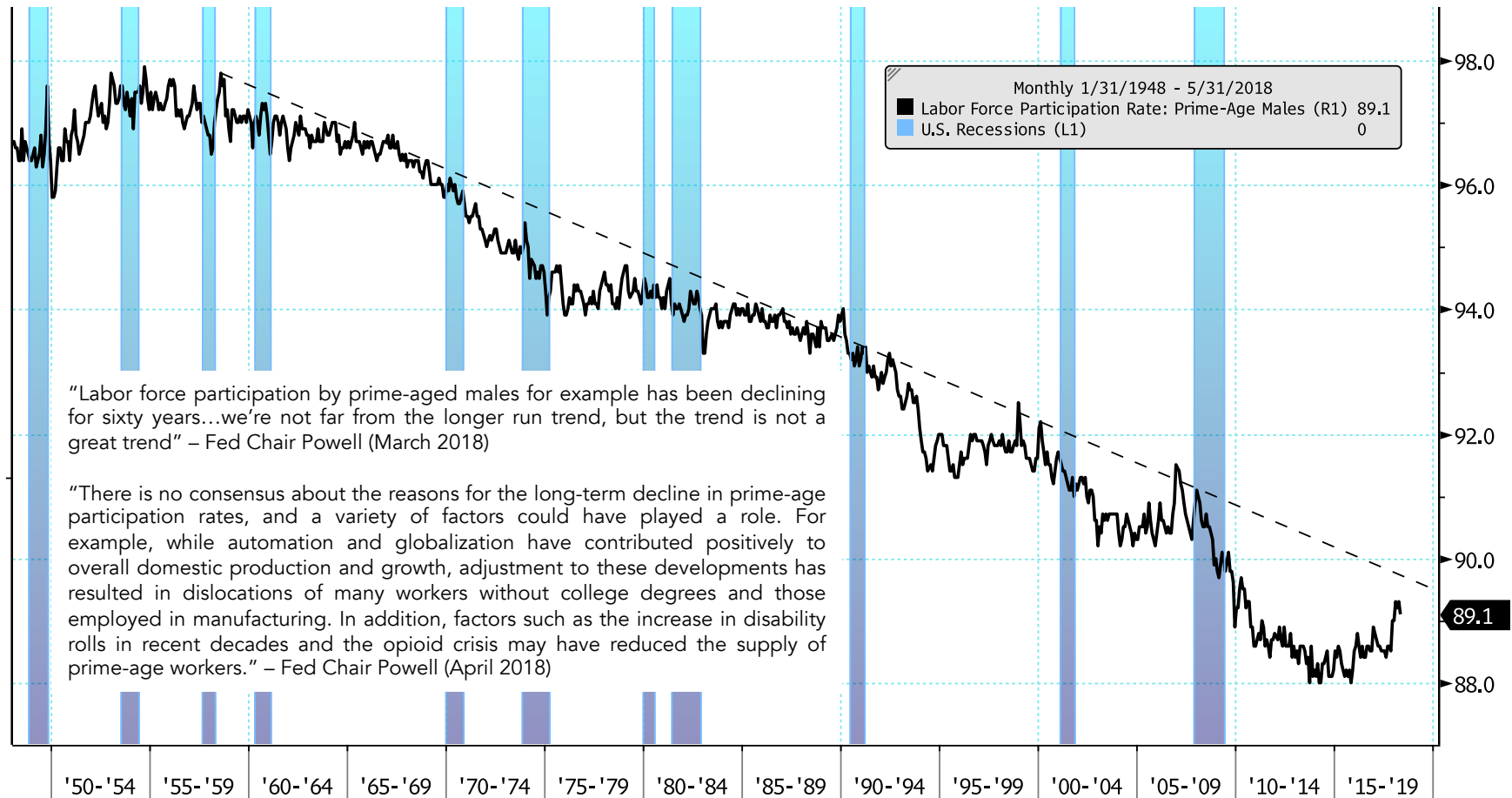
*The latest two data points show a downtick*

*I think in Powell's mind that suggests the labor market might not be at maximum employment yet.*

*\*This chart relates to the maximum employment mandate\**

## Prime-age (25-54) Male Labor Force Participation Rate

The labor force is the percent of the population that is either working or actively looking for work, in this case males between the ages of 25-54



Source: Bloomberg, © Merk Investments LLC

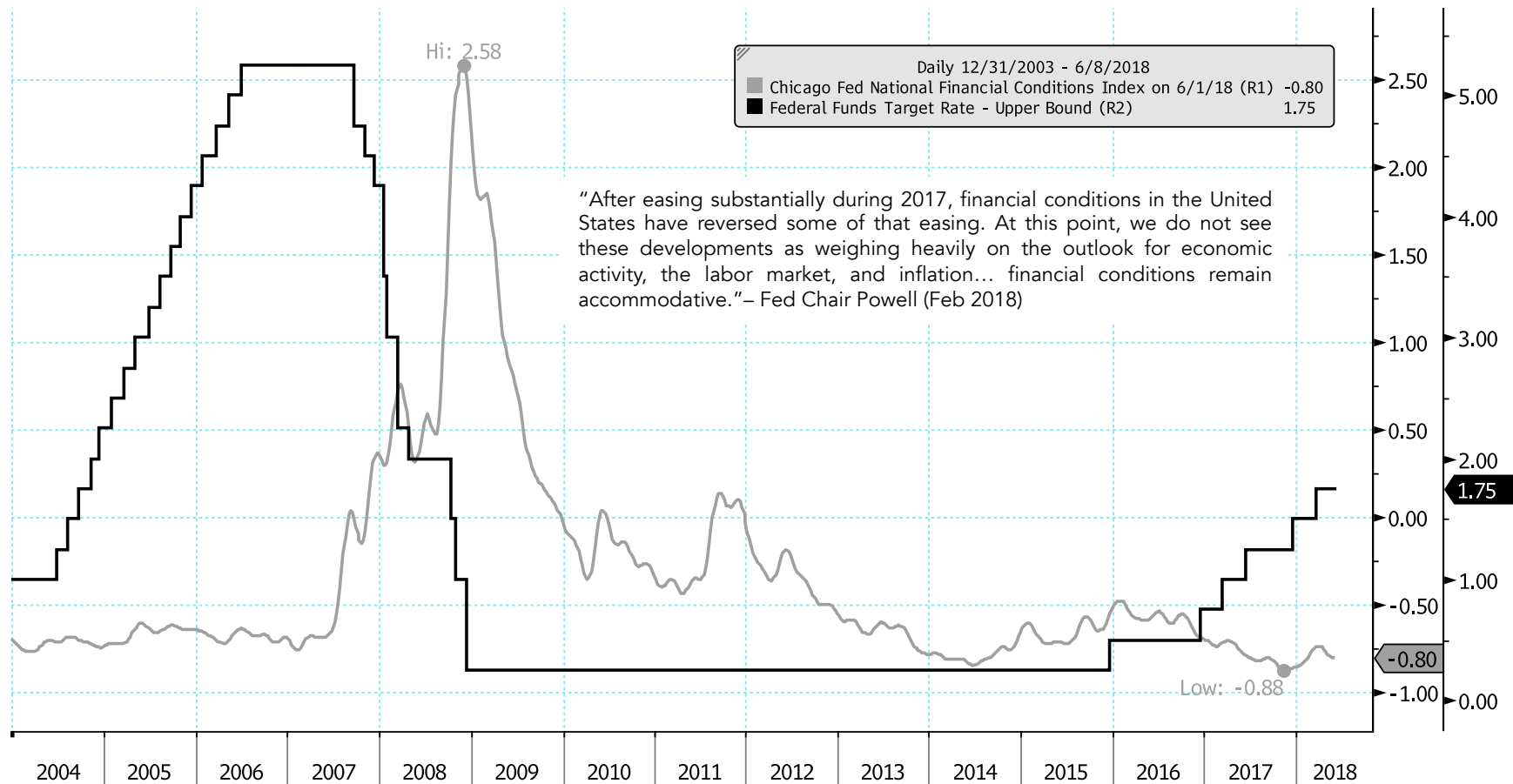
*Analysis: A prime-age male labor force participation rate above the dotted line might represent a labor market that is close to maximum employment in Powell's framework.*

*The latest data points show a little bit of downtick*

*\*This chart relates to the maximum employment mandate\**

## Fed Funds Rate and Financial Conditions

Chicago Fed National Financial Conditions Index and the Fed Funds Rate

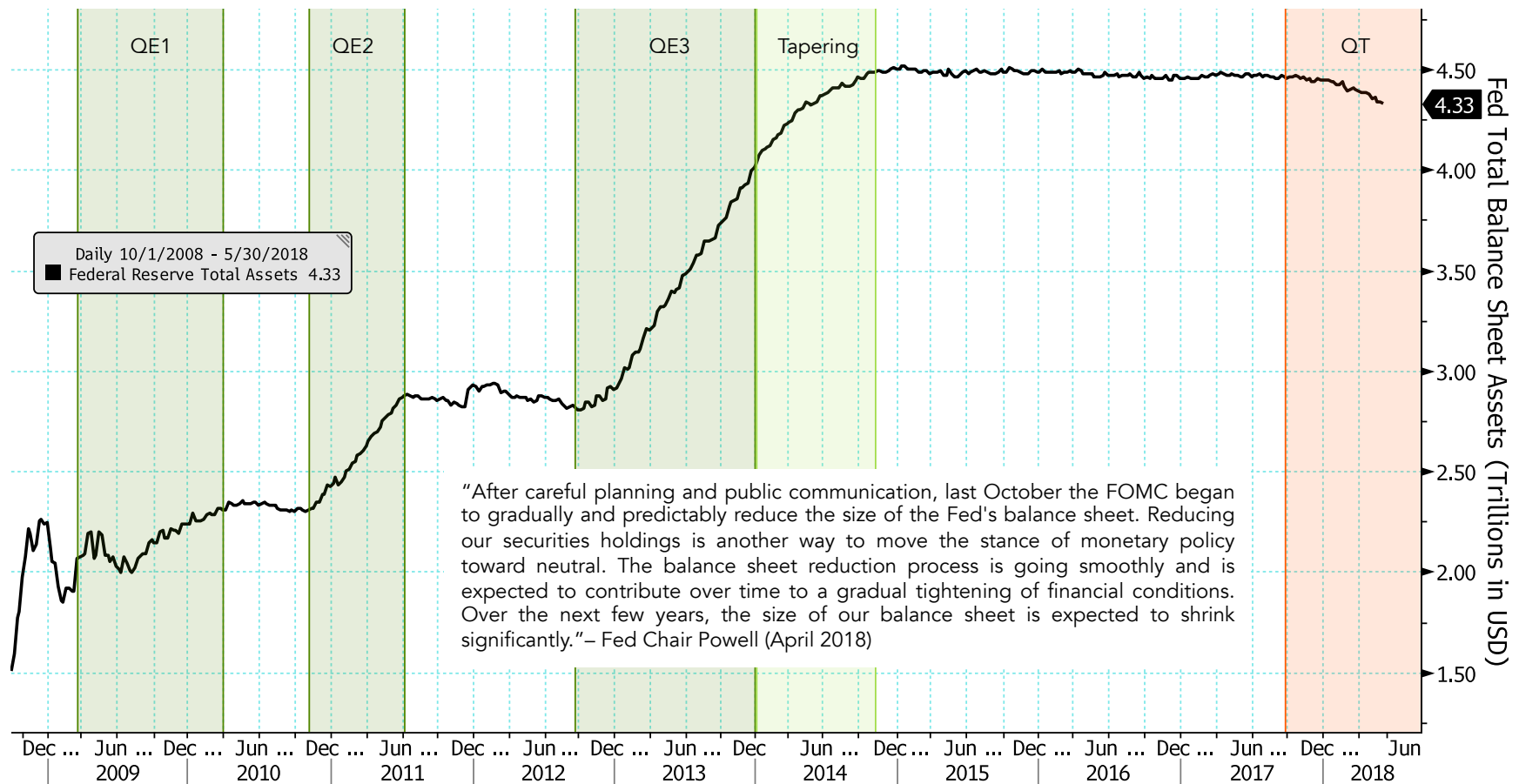


Source: Bloomberg, © Merk Investments LLC

*Analysis: Financial stability, which can be measured by financial conditions, is sometimes thought of as an implicit third mandate of the Fed. Fed hikes so far have had little impact on financial conditions, although Fed officials have historically commented that monetary policy acts with a lag (some estimates suggest an 18 month lag).*

## Fed Balance Sheet

Federal Reserve Balance Sheet Total Assets and QE/QT Operation Phases



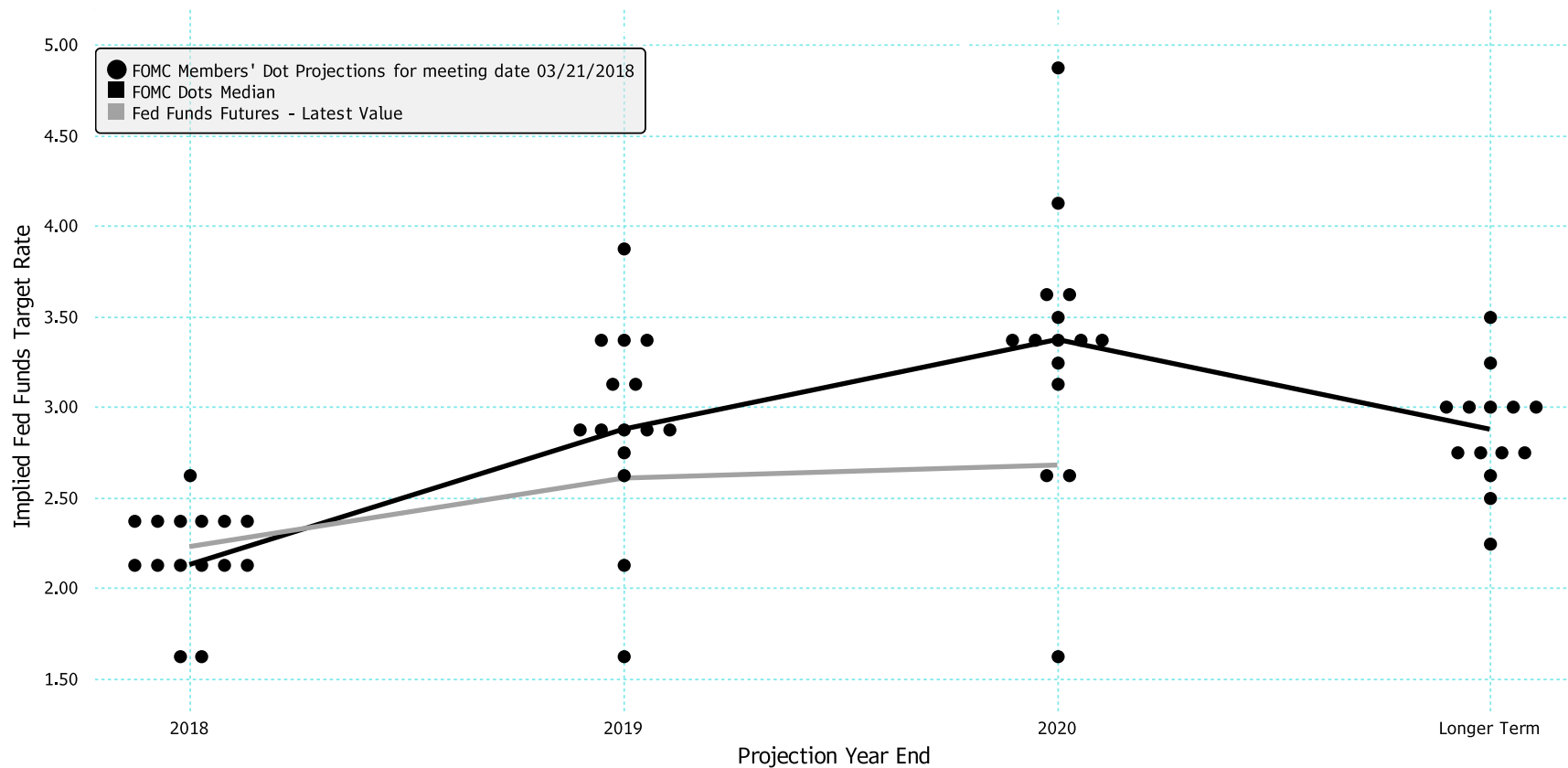
Source: Bloomberg, © Merk Investments LLC

*Analysis: Fed balance sheet contraction might get financial conditions to tighten more than the rate hikes, and balance sheet normalization is set on “auto-pilot” whereas the rate hike decisions are made on a meeting by meeting basis and are data dependent.*

*As mentioned on the previous slide, monetary policy can act with a lag, the rate hikes and Fed balance sheet action from 2017 might not be fully felt until 2019.*

## Fed "Dot Plot"

FOMC participants' assessments of appropriate monetary policy from March 2018 Meeting, and Fed Funds Futures from 6/8/18



Source: Bloomberg, © Merk Investments LLC

*Analysis: the dots represent FOMC participants' assessments of appropriate monetary policy. The market pricing, represented by the Fed Funds Futures (grey line) is slightly above the median dot for year end 2018 but below the median dots for year end 2019 and 2020.*

## Fed Median Economic Projections: March 2018

FOMC participants' economic projections are under their individual assessments of projected appropriate monetary policy

Variable	2018	2019	2020	Longer run
Change in Real GDP	2.7%	2.4%	2.0%	1.8%
Unemployment Rate	3.8%	3.6%	3.6%	4.5%
PCE Inflation	1.9%	2.0%	2.1%	2.0%
Core PCE Inflation	1.9%	2.1%	2.1%	N/A
Fed Funds Rate	2.1%	2.9%	3.4%	2.9%

Source: Federal Reserve, © Merk Investments LLC

*Analysis: The above economic projections of Federal Reserve Board members and Federal Reserve Bank presidents are made under their individual assessments of projected appropriate monetary policy, which are represented in the previous dot chart.*

*The longer run inflation expectation is 2.0%, the longer run Fed Funds rate projection is 2.9% (3.0% in terms of the upper range of the Fed funds target rate), which represents the Fed's best guess at the natural rate of interest. The natural rate can be disaggregated into a natural real rate (i.e., net of inflation) and an inflation rate. The Fed's inflation projection is 2.0% which suggests they view the natural real rate of interest at 1.0%.*

*The longer run unemployment rate projection is 4.5%, which is the Fed's best guess at the natural unemployment rate. At the current rate of 3.8% there is some chance that the economy is operating above capacity.*

## Who's Who at the Fed

Category	Name	Role	Status	Dove-Hawk Scale*
Board of Governors	Jerome Powell	Chair	Voter	Neutral
Board of Governors	[Richard Clarida]	Vice Chair [nominee]	[Voter]	
Board of Governors	Lael Brainard	Governor	Voter	Neutral/Dovish
Board of Governors	Randal Quarles	Governor	Voter	Neutral
Board of Governors	[vacant]	Governor	[Voter]	
Board of Governors	[vacant]	Governor	[Voter]	
Board of Governors	[vacant]	Governor	[Voter]	
Regional President	William Dudley	New York Fed President	Voter	Neutral
Regional President	Eric Rosengren	Boston Fed President		Neutral/Hawkish
Regional President	Patrick Harker	Philadelphia Fed President		Neutral
Regional President	Loretta Mester	Cleveland Fed President	Voter	Neutral/Hawkish
Regional President	Thomas Barkin	Richmond Fed President	Voter	Neutral/Hawkish
Regional President	Raphael Bostic	Atlanta Fed President	Voter	Neutral
Regional President	Charles Evans	Chicago Fed President		Neutral/Dovish
Regional President	James Bullard	St. Louis Fed President		Dovish
Regional President	Neel Kashkari	Minneapolis Fed President		Dovish
Regional President	Esther George	Kansas City Fed President		Hawkish
Regional President	Robert Kaplan	Dallas Fed President		Neutral/Hawkish
Regional President	John Williams	San Francisco Fed President	Voter	Neutral/Hawkish

Source: Bloomberg, © Merk Investments LLC

*Analysis: All board members vote. The NY Fed President always votes, and then four rotating regional presidents vote. There are four vacancies on the board. Richard Clarida is in the process of being confirmed for the Vice Chair position. President Trump has yet to nominate three remaining vacancies on the board. John Williams will take over for William Dudley at the NY Fed on June 18<sup>th</sup>, 2018.*

*\*The dove-hawk scale relates to the views of appropriate monetary policy: with hawks likely representing the upper end of the spectrum on the dot plot and the doves likely representing the lower end of the spectrum.*

## Conclusion/Thoughts

The Fed's monetary policy has important implications for the bond, stock, and currency markets, and the economic cycle generally. In this chart series my goal is to track the data that I think the Fed, and Chair Powell specifically, is most focused on based on ongoing public communications.

Powell has emphasized a gradual approach to raising the federal funds rate. He views the current monetary policy stance as accommodative and aims to bring the federal funds rate up to the normal longer-run rate (currently estimated at 3.00%) in line with the timing of inflation moving to the 2 percent target on a sustainable basis and the labor market moving to a state of maximum employment. In Powell's framework a federal funds rate at the normal longer-run rate would represent a neutral monetary policy stance, neither accommodative nor restrictive.

Three rate hikes this year (one already done in March and one expected at the June meeting) and three rate hikes next year, would bring the federal funds rate to 3.00%. That is the rate path suggested by the median Fed estimates on the Summary of Economic Projections (SEP) Dot Plot from March, an updated SEP will be released at the June meeting. The market, as of writing, is pricing-in about 4.8 rate hikes combined for this year and next, about 3.2 hikes this year and 1.6 hikes next year.

I expect the Fed to raise rates 25 basis points at the June meeting. Powell may clarify what the Fed means by "symmetric" given that a number of commentators have assumed it means the Fed is willing to tolerate an overshoot of inflation given that there has been some undershoot during this expansion. If Powell pushes back against that interpretation, which I think he would, it might be judged as hawkish- in other words, fed rate hike expectations priced by Fed Funds Futures might rise.

At some point the Fed may revise or delete the sentence in the statement that reads: "the federal funds rate is likely to remain, for some time, below levels that are expected to prevail in the longer run." Some Fed officials think that sentence is unnecessarily dovish forward guidance given that the hiking cycle is well underway and projected to continue. The level that is expected to prevail over the longer run is probably best captured in the median longer run dot on the dot plot, which is currently 3.00%.

-Nick Reece, CFA

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