



Basis Points – April 21, 2020

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Above the Fold

Is the U.S. Ready to Get Back to Work?

Millions of Americans (roughly 97%) remain under stay-at-home or shelter-in-place orders and most of us are ready for life to return to normal as our livelihoods, and sanity, may be on the line if America remains closed. That said, polls show **most** people want to feel safe before venturing back into work or even into public shops and areas. But ensuring the health of all is going to be an extremely tall order, even with the most comprehensive strategies — and that means the process is likely to be slow and clunky at best. Social distancing will likely remain a major tactic for the foreseeable future; so even if businesses open, the experience is likely to change.

President Trump has laid out an optimistic plan to get our country back “open” again, starting May 1, but each state has its own method to get back to some sense of normalcy. The federal guidelines do offer basic frameworks and guidelines to help prevent another spike in cases and deaths, but they are far from perfect. What we do know is that states have already begun setting dates and benchmarks to slowly throttle commerce back to what it was before. Some neighboring states’ governors have even formed pacts to make the transitions as smooth as possible, and to share critical data on outcomes in certain regions of the country.

There’s still a long road ahead, and the recovery will vary from state to state and even city to city. Be sure to check your local and state government’s website for the latest updates on planning and restrictions.

Three Things

1. *Oil Goes Negative ... What Does That Even Mean?* – With demand at extreme lows and producers still flooding the market with fresh oil, the price of May crude oil futures went below \$0 for the first time since it started trading in 1983. This means that investors who took delivery of oil this week got paid to do so (sort of like getting paid to fill up your fuel tank). But since nearly every storage facility and pipeline is full, moving and storing the oil will be a challenge.
2. *Your Bathroom May Never Be the Same* – America’s toilet paper crisis of 2020 may have an unexpected winner ... the bidet. Relatively inexpensive electronic bidets, which replace your toilet seat and only require a power source, are becoming extremely popular and could become commonplace across the states. Companies like Toto and Tushy are seeing record sales as our bathroom habits evolve.
3. *Yes, Realtors Are Still a Thing* – iBuying algorithms driven by companies like Zillow, Redfin, Opendoor, Knock and others disrupted the real estate industry with big data that targets cheap real estate for its investors. Unfortunately, this automated industry was turned on its head by another disruptor, COVID-19. Many of these firms have laid off large swaths of workers as most have “turned off” iBuying features until after the pandemic passes. Luckily, phones still work and human realtors are still able to handle transactions readily.

Did You Know?

The Latest (Fact-Checked) COVID-19 Positives

- While scientists don't have complete data yet, they do know that the novel coronavirus that causes COVID-19 is from a family that does not do well in the heat. Researchers in Hong Kong found that the virus deteriorated outside its host when temperatures started rising above 70 degrees. This could be good news as summer approaches.
- A widely used and accepted model from the University of Washington's Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) lowered projections for estimated total U.S. deaths, suggesting improvements in our fight against the virus.

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