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CLIENT BULLETIN

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➤ ***Tax Documents – It's That's Time Again***

2019 will be a hybrid year for tax documents, with forms coming from multiple custodians as a result of the transition of accounts to TD Ameritrade Institutional in September of last year. We will be coordinating with clients and their tax preparers to make the process as easy as possible. Please contact us if we can assist with documents needed for the preparation of your 2019 income tax returns.

➤ ***Employment***

Economic times are so good right now that companies are having a difficult time finding good employees. A recent Wall Street Journal article by Paul Ziobro's (12/7/19 - FedEx Goes Deep Into Mississippi Delta to Find Workers) documents the company's year-round (not just Christmas) program of busing people two hours and more from rural areas to its Memphis hub, where unemployment is functionally nonexistent. The same story is true for UPS' main air hub of Louisville, Kentucky. The reality that there are more job openings than there are people looking for jobs seems like an abstraction to most of us – until we learn of programs like this that change people's lives for the better.

➤ ***Hopelessly Devoted?***

The Boston Consulting Group conducted a global poll to determine how devoted respondents were to their mobile phones. They asked the question: which of the following things would you give up for a year rather than give up personal use of your mobile phone? 64% of respondents said they would give up dining out for a year before giving up use of their mobile phone. Other results included: having a pet (51% would give that up); going on vacation (50%); one day off from work per week (51%); and seeing friends in person (45%). The poll was funded by QUALCOMM. No wonder some high-tech employees won't let their own children have cell phones.

➤ ***Ring, Ring***

In the U.S. alone, an average of 182 million robocalls are made each day. Some of these calls are legitimate but the majority are scam/spoof calls. In an effort to thwart both the annoyance of the calls, as well as consumer exposure to scams, the FCC has been working in conjunction with phone carriers to implement a new authentication technology to keep these nefarious calls at bay (source: FCC.gov and Planet Money).

➤ ***It's a New World***

The January 8th retaliatory missile attack on U.S.-shared military bases in Iraq captured headline news as it should. The economic impact, or lack thereof, however, didn't receive much press. In years past, a geopolitical event like this would have sent energy prices significantly higher. Higher prices for gasoline, heating oil and other energy-related goods (including omnipresent plastic) and services would have rippled through the US economy when consumer spending took a hit as households spent more on oil-related goods and services and less on everything else. This would have led to slowing economic growth and you likely would have seen headlines such as "Spike in Oil Prices May Lead to Recession".

➤ ***Independence***

As detailed in this Client Bulletin before, thanks to advanced technologies, the United States is now energy independent and more insulated from events in the Middle East. In the immediate aftermath of the attack, oil prices did shoot higher, but as the perceived threat to global oil supplies diminished crude prices came right back down and the economy was not affected.

➤ ***Let's Hear It for the Girls***

The December 2019 employment report revealed that, for the first time ever, more payroll jobs were held by women (50.04%) than men. Since 2018 women have been joining the workforce at a faster rate than men due in part to the faster growth rate of sectors like health care and education that are dominated by women. Another factor is that in recent years women are earning college degrees in larger numbers than men. We are also seeing women make waves in sectors usually dominated by men, such as the San Francisco Giants hiring the first female full-time assistant coach in Major League Baseball history. As women rise to higher positions within businesses, there is room for more women to join in and shift the equilibrium in the future. (source: Washington Post).

➤ ***Money CAN Buy Happiness***

In a recent survey, 70% of survey participants who work with a financial advisor said they are happy with their life, compared with 50% of people who don't have professional help. Just sayin' (source: Northwestern Mutual).

➤ ***Slowing Population Growth***

Between 7/1/18 and 7/1/19, the US population grew by less than $\frac{1}{2}$ of 1%. That's the lowest year-over-year growth rate in the United States since 1918 (source: Census Bureau).

➤ ***Still Feeling SECURE***

Last month we discussed provisions of the SECURE Act regarding retirement planning. The new law also expands uses for **Section 529 college savings plans**. The Secure Act modifies the definition of "qualified higher education expense" to include (1) certain expenses for apprenticeship programs registered with the Secretary of Labor; and (2) up to \$10,000 per person for the purpose of paying back qualified education loans. The SECURE Act makes this change retroactive to distributions made after December 31, 2018.

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