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Top 10 Reasons to Own Stocks in 2014

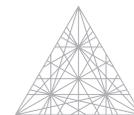
Howard Ward, Portfolio Manager of The GAMCO Growth Fund and The GAMCO Global Opportunity Fund, presented his Top 10 Reasons to Own Stocks in 2014 at the 2013 Schwab Impact Conference.

- I. The U.S. economy is poised for its fourth consecutive year of record GDP and profits in 2014, helped by the Euro Zone exiting recession, Japanese stimulus and continued growth in China. A global synchronized expansion is developing.
- II. Stocks are likely to benefit from better global growth as profits rise, while bond prices are generally expected to decline, as the Fed tapers its bond buying and inflation slowly rises. The great rotation has just begun.
- III. Taper or not, monetary policy remains generously accommodative with little likelihood of an increase in the Fed Funds target rate before 2015. The European Central Bank and Bank of Japan are firmly anchored in the expansionary camp as well. Fighting the Fed has not worked.
- IV. Stock prices are a function of earnings and price to earnings multiples. While inflation has bottomed, it is expected to be around 2% in 2014, possibly supporting an expansion in P/E multiples from the current 15 times forward earnings to 16 or 17 times, which is more typical in an environment of 2% inflation.
- V. Stocks remain under-owned. Households, with \$43 trillion in financial assets, are only 38% invested in stocks, compared with 53% in 2000. Private pension funds, with \$8 trillion in assets, are 30% invested in stocks, versus 50% at their previous peak in 1987. I ask the question, what do you want your portfolio to correlate to if not the stock market, which has historically provided the highest returns?
- VI. Stocks remain attractively priced relative to bonds. On a price-to-forward-earnings basis, stocks continue to sell at their historical average of 15 times earnings. The 10-year Treasury is selling at about a 2.7% yield, far below its historical average of about 6%.
- VII. Dividends are tax advantaged and have historically provided around 40% of the market's total return. The dividend payout ratio remains low, at around 30%, leaving plenty of upside for dividend increases. Historically the payout ratio has averaged 58% of earnings going back to 1926.
- VIII. The market likes gridlock. As bad as the sequestration is, it is arguably the best legislation thus far produced by this Congress and signed by this President. We predict the result of the 2014 mid-term elections will be more gridlock. This means no dramatic change in policies, and that's got to be viewed as a win in this environment.
- IX. On the back of 4 years of growth and rising stock prices, investor sentiment is rising and so is confidence in the executive suite. This should lead to more mergers and acquisitions as companies scramble to enlarge footprints, enter new markets and build greater economies of scale. Balance sheets have never been stronger.
- X. Given today's interest rate structure and expectations for global growth, we believe stocks will outperform cash and bonds over the next few years, although recent double digit returns are likely to prove unsustainable. Investors entering the market now should strongly consider dollar cost averaging to reduce risk.

In closing, there is obviously a risk to being in the stock market. There is also a risk in being out of the stock market.

Important disclosure information on back

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