Caron's Corner Transcript – 4.10.2023

Brace for Impact! Soft Landing to Collide with Hard Data

- The consensus perspective is that the worst is yet to come and the lags from global policy tightening have yet to bite.
- That consensus view also foots to a mild recession or a "soft landing," because while we may see a weakening of economic data, it is still coming from a position of strength.
- In addition the savings rate is still solid and real incomes strong to the point where consumption may hold steady and support GDP - all soft landing sympathies.
- In this case the fact that the data is simply weakening may matter MORE in the near term than the level to which it actually falls.
- But the upcoming run of hard data – data that is directly tied to jobs, retail sales, units of production etc. - is expected to show material signs of weakening.
- As a result, **hard data** may be on collision course with a **soft landing** over the coming quarters.

Jim Caron: Hello, this is Jim Caron, Co-CIO of the Global Balanced and Risk Control strategies. In today's market one top-of-mind topic is that a soft landing may be colliding with hard data. Many have a soft landing narrative in mind, but the hard data might be pushing back against that at least in the second quarter. Let's go through this.

The consensus view and narrative from an economic outlook perspective is that the worst is yet to come and that the lags from global policy tightening have yet to bite. But the consensus view is also sympathetic with a mild recession or a soft landing, and this is because although we may see weakening of economic data, it's coming from a very strong place. True, labor markets are softening, but from tight levels. Jobless claims are rising despite some seasonal distortions, but they are still low even though they're rising. The JOLTS (Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey) data indicates there are less than 10 million job openings, and that's a first in a long, long time. The vacancy to unemployment rate is also falling and the monthly jobs data we got this past Friday (April 7) is also starting to show a sharp decline in private payrolls. So we're starting to see some of the hard data actually start to weaken, but the savings rate is still strong as are real incomes. As such, consumption may hold up and that's going to be supportive of GDP. These are all soft landing sympathies.

However, sometimes it's the delta (change) that matters. The fact that the data is weakening may be more about the near term than the level to which it actually lands. The upcoming run of hard data, the data that is actually tied to output like jobs, retail sales and production units, things of that nature, all that data is expected to slow materially and have signs of weakening as a result. This hard data may be on a collision course with a soft landing over the coming quarters. What gives? Well let's get into it.

The first place I'd like to start is the equity market. I call it "taking stock" by the numbers and given that it's the start of the second quarter and upcoming earnings will be discussed at length over the next month, I think it's informative if we take a closer look at the projected path over the coming quarters. Now, I'm not making any forecasts here, instead just commenting on the path of consensus earning forecasts from Bloomberg data over the next quarters. Consensus estimates call for a 7% year-over-year decline in earnings in the first quarter, a big decline, the largest since the third quarter of 2020 which was the post-COVID lockdown period. If true, then the first quarter may mark a drop in earnings growth rates but only to be followed by a similar magnitude decline in the second quarter, which represents back-to-back quarters with large declines in year-over-year earnings growth rates. Some might call this an earnings recession, but combined, they form a trough if analysts expectations are realized. No wonder economists were calling for a recession in the first half of 2023 because this was the broad expectation.

But as discussed last week, a recession is unlikely in the first half of 2023, as the "can has been kicked" down to the second half of 2023. The acceleration in economic activity in the first quarter will likely be looked back on as a counterweight to the weak first quarter year-over-year earnings growth rates. Maybe that's why equity prices didn't collapse because we had good data, despite the fact that there were the earnings declines coming through. However, the second quarter may not have the same luxury as the first quarter since both earnings growth rates and economic data may show signs of weakness in the second quarter. This is what makes the second quarter so treacherous. Full year 2023 bottoms-up earnings have been cut 12% since the end of the second quarter of 2022 already, and they've been cut 4% YTD. Perhaps there are more revisions on the downside to come, we will just have to wait and see.

I'd now like to talk about the new pivot, what we call the earnings pivot, not the Fed pivot. So is there any potential good news that's out there? This is a question we have to ask whenever we get some bad news and I think the answer is yes. As we said earlier, the first and second quarter together may be the trough in earnings growth rates. After that, growth rates may start to improve, albeit slowly, but they're likely to start to improve. Again, sometimes it's the delta that matters. To level set, bottoms-up 2023 consensus earnings are forecasted to be about $220 based on Bloomberg data. But for 2024 it's expected to go to $247. To repeat, we're supposed to get $220 by consensus in 2023 and in 2024 it goes up to $247 (all of course subject to revisions). The point is that there's a pivot in there somewhere. It is hard to say when definitively, but maybe by the end of the second quarter of 2023.

Let's now turn to the big, bad bond market and this is where I like to quote James Carville who said "bonds intimidate everyone." If you look at the negative sentiment that's in the market, the negative sentiment hasn't missed the bond market at all. One only needs to look at the yields and the multiple Fed rate cuts that are priced in by the end of the year. The flip side to the negative sentiment is that lower nominal yields, lower real yields and, if expectations for rate cuts manifest themselves, then a steeper curve all point to stimulative signals for the forward looking economy by year end. We can't dismiss that. The fact that rates have come down and the curve may steepen in the future is somewhat of a forward looking stimulus for the market, and the stimulus and supportive signal may be happening when earnings growth rates are starting to pick up. Take special note of this, it might be a slow pick up but it might be happening. Again, it could be the delta that matters.

So claim the bond market is smarter than the equity market. Look, I disagree with that, I just think bond traders get up earlier and stay later. The point is that the market pricing for interest rates in yield curves turns supportive on a forward looking basis towards the end of the year. Could it be that the equity market prices are rational after all? Could it be that equities are looking through the trough in earnings toward increasing earnings growth rates alongside stimulative interest rates and yield curves? Could it be these are the questions that we need to ask if the market is willing to look through the first quarter and second quarter negative earnings? Well, we think so. We think the markets can be rational and that they can look through this. We think the risks are more balanced than what the market is appreciating and it's certainly more than what the consensus narrative would suggest. The bar is very low to beat these negative expectations and surprise to the upside. High cash holdings indicate that investors are not positioned for this. There will be potentially big bumps along the way, volatility and surprises and nobody is saying that we're out of the woods yet. But we're keeping an open mind.

Remember it's better to be balanced and defensive and build in risk controls for discipline when investing.

RISK CONSIDERATIONS

Diversification does not eliminate the risk of loss. There is no assurance that the Strategy will achieve its investment objective. Portfolios are subject to market risk, which is the possibility that the market values of securities owned by the portfolio will decline and that the value of portfolio shares may therefore be less than what you paid for them. Market values can change daily due to economic and other events (e.g. natural disasters, health crises, terrorism, conflicts and social unrest) that affect markets, countries, companies or governments. It is difficult to predict the timing, duration, and potential adverse effects (e.g. portfolio liquidity) of events. Accordingly, you can lose money investing in this portfolio. Please be aware that this strategy may be subject to certain additional risks. There is the risk that the Adviser's **asset allocation methodology and assumptions** regarding the Underlying Portfolios may be incorrect in light of actual market conditions and the Portfolio may not achieve its investment objective. Share prices also tend to be volatile and there is a significant possibility of loss. The portfolio's investments in **commodity-linked notes** involve substantial risks, including risk of loss of a significant portion of their principal value. In addition to commodity risk, they may be subject to additional special risks, such as risk of loss of interest and principal, lack of secondary market and risk of greater volatility, that do not affect traditional equity and debt securities. **Currency fluctuations** could erase investment gains or add to investment losses. **Fixed-income securities** are subject to the ability of an issuer to make timely principal and interest payments (credit risk), changes in interest rates (interest-rate risk), the creditworthiness of the issuer and general market liquidity (market risk). In a rising interest-rate environment, bond prices may fall and may result in periods of volatility and increased portfolio redemptions. In a declining interest-rate environment, the portfolio may generate less income. **Longer-term securities** may be more sensitive to interest rate changes. **Equity and foreign securities** are generally more volatile than fixed income securities and are subject to currency, political, economic and market risks. Equity values fluctuate in response to activities specific to a company. Stocks of **small-capitalization companies** carry special risks, such as limited product lines, markets and financial

resources, and greater market volatility than securities of larger, more established companies. The risks of investing in **emerging market** countries are greater than risks associated with investments in foreign developed markets. **Exchange traded funds (ETFs)** shares have many of the same risks as direct investments in common stocks or bonds and their market value will fluctuate as the value of the underlying index does. By investing in exchange traded funds ETFs and other **Investment Funds**, the portfolio absorbs both its own expenses and those of the ETFs and Investment Funds it invests in. Supply and demand for ETFs and Investment Funds may not be correlated to that of the underlying securities. **Derivative instruments** can be illiquid, may disproportionately increase losses and may have a potentially large negative impact on the portfolio's performance. A **currency forward** is a hedging tool that does not involve any upfront payment. The use of **leverage** may increase volatility in the Portfolio.

IMPORTANT DISCLOSURES:

Past performance is no guarantee of future results. The returns referred to in the audio are those of representative indices and are not meant to depict the performance of a specific investment.

There is no guarantee that any investment strategy will work under all market conditions, and each investor should evaluate their ability to invest for the long-term, especially during periods of downturn in the market.

A separately managed account may not be appropriate for all investors. Separate accounts managed according to the particular Strategy may include securities that may not necessarily track the performance of a particular index. Please consider the investment objectives, risks and fees of the Strategy carefully before investing. A minimum asset level is required.

For important information about the investment managers, please refer to Form ADV Part 2.

The views and opinions and/or analysis expressed are those of the author or the investment team as of the date of preparation of this material and are subject to change at any time without notice due to market or economic conditions and may not necessarily come to pass. Furthermore, the views will not be updated or otherwise revised to reflect information that subsequently becomes available or circumstances existing, or changes occurring, after the date of publication. The views expressed do not reflect the opinions of all investment personnel at Morgan Stanley Investment Management (MSIM) and its subsidiaries and affiliates (collectively "the Firm"), and may not be reflected in all the strategies and products that the Firm offers.

Forecasts and/or estimates provided herein are subject to change and may not actually come to pass. Information regarding expected market returns and market outlooks is based on the research, analysis and opinions of the authors or the investment team. These conclusions are speculative in nature, may not come to pass and are not intended to predict the future performance of any specific strategy or product the Firm offers. Future results may differ significantly depending on factors such as changes in securities or financial markets or general economic conditions.

This material has been prepared on the basis of publicly available information, internally developed data and other third-party sources believed to be reliable. However, no assurances are provided regarding the reliability of such information and the Firm has not sought to independently verify information taken from public and third-party sources.

This material is a general communication, which is not impartial and all information provided has been prepared solely for informational and educational purposes and does not constitute an offer or a recommendation to buy or sell any particular security or to adopt any specific investment strategy. The information herein has not been based

on a consideration of any individual investor circumstances and is not investment advice, nor should it be construed in any way as tax, accounting, legal or regulatory advice. To that end, investors should seek independent legal and financial advice, including advice as to tax consequences, before making any investment decision.

The indexes are unmanaged and do not include any expenses, fees or sales charges. It is not possible to invest directly in an index. Any index referred to herein is the intellectual property (including registered trademarks) of the applicable licensor. Any product based on an index is in no way sponsored, endorsed, sold or promoted by the applicable licensor and it shall not have any liability with respect thereto.

This material is not a product of Morgan Stanley's Research Department and should not be regarded as a research material or a recommendation.

The Firm has not authorised financial intermediaries to use and to distribute this material, unless such use and distribution is made in accordance with applicable law and regulation. Additionally, financial intermediaries are required to satisfy themselves that the information in this material is appropriate for any person to whom they provide this material in view of that person's circumstances and purpose. The Firm shall not be liable for, and accepts no liability for, the use or misuse of this material by any such financial intermediary.

This material may be translated into other languages. Where such a translation is made this English version remains definitive. If there are any discrepancies between the English version and any version of this material in another language, the English version shall prevail.

The whole or any part of this material may not be directly or indirectly reproduced, copied, modified, used to create a derivative work, performed, displayed, published, posted, licensed, framed, distributed or transmitted or any of its contents disclosed to third parties without the Firm's express written consent. This material may not be linked to unless such hyperlink is for personal and non-commercial use. All information contained herein is proprietary and is protected under copyright and other applicable law.

Eaton Vance is part of Morgan Stanley Investment Management. Morgan Stanley Investment Management is the asset management division of Morgan Stanley.

DISTRIBUTION

This material is only intended for and will only be distributed to persons resident in jurisdictions where such distribution or availability would not be contrary to local laws or regulations.

MSIM, the asset management division of Morgan Stanley (NYSE: MS), and its affiliates have arrangements in place to market each other's products and services. Each MSIM affiliate is regulated as appropriate in the jurisdiction it operates. MSIM's affiliates are: Eaton Vance Management (International) Limited, Eaton Vance Advisers International Ltd, Calvert Research and Management, Eaton Vance Management, Parametric Portfolio Associates LLC and Atlanta Capital Management LLC.

This material has been issued by any one or more of the following entities:

EMEA:

This material is for Professional Clients/Accredited Investors only.

In the EU, MSIM and Eaton Vance materials are issued by MSIM Fund Management (Ireland) Limited ("FMIL"). FMIL is regulated by the Central Bank of Ireland and is incorporated in Ireland as a private company limited by

shares with company registration number 616661 and has its registered address at The Observatory, 7-11 Sir John Rogerson's Quay, Dublin 2, D02 VC42, Ireland.

Outside the EU, MSIM materials are issued by Morgan Stanley Investment Management Limited (MSIM Ltd) is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority. Registered in England. Registered No. 1981121. Registered Office: 25 Cabot Square, Canary Wharf, London E14 4QA.

In Switzerland, MSIM materials are issued by Morgan Stanley & Co. International plc, London (Zurich Branch) Authorised and regulated by the Eidgenössische Finanzmarktaufsicht ("FINMA"). Registered Office: Beethovenstrasse 33, 8002 Zurich, Switzerland.

Outside the US and EU, Eaton Vance materials are issued by Eaton Vance Management (International) Limited (“EVMI”) 125 Old Broad Street, London, EC2N 1AR, UK, which is authorised and regulated in the United Kingdom by the Financial Conduct Authority.

Italy: MSIM FMIL (Milan Branch), (Sede Secondaria di Milano) Palazzo Serbelloni Corso Venezia, 16 20121 Milano, Italy. The **Netherlands:** MSIM FMIL (Amsterdam Branch), Rembrandt Tower, 11th Floor Amstelplein 1 1096HA, Netherlands. **France:** MSIM FMIL (Paris Branch), 61 rue de Monceau 75008 Paris, France. **Spain:** MSIM FMIL (Madrid Branch), Calle Serrano 55, 28006, Madrid, Spain. **Germany**: MSIM FMIL, Frankfurt Branch, Grosse Gallusstrasse 18, 60312 Frankfurt am Main, Germany (Gattung: Zweigniederlassung (FDI) gem. § 53b KWG). **Denmark:** MSIM FMIL (Copenhagen Branch), Gorrissen Federspiel, Axel Towers, Axeltorv2, 1609 Copenhagen V, Denmark.

MIDDLE EAST:
Dubai: MSIM Ltd (Representative Office, Unit Precinct 3-7th Floor-Unit 701 and 702, Level 7, Gate Precinct Building 3, Dubai International Financial Centre, Dubai, 506501, United Arab Emirates. Telephone: +97 (0)14 709 7158).

This document is distributed in the Dubai International Financial Centre by Morgan Stanley Investment Management Limited (Representative Office), an entity regulated by the Dubai Financial Services Authority (DFSA). It is intended for use by professional clients and market counterparties only. This document is not intended for distribution to retail clients, and retail clients should not act upon the information contained in this document.

This document relates to a financial product which is not subject to any form of regulation or approval by the DFSA. The DFSA has no responsibility for reviewing or verifying any documents in connection with this financial product. Accordingly, the DFSA has not approved this document or any other associated documents nor taken any steps to verify the information set out in this document, and has no responsibility for it. The financial product to which this document relates may be illiquid and/or subject to restrictions on its resale or transfer. Prospective purchasers should conduct their own due diligence on the financial product. If you do not understand the contents of this document, you should consult an authorised financial adviser.

U.S.: NOT FDIC INSURED | OFFER NO BANK GUARANTEE | MAY LOSE VALUE | NOT INSURED BY ANY FEDERAL GOVERNMENT AGENCY | NOT A DEPOSIT

Latin America (Brazil, Chile Colombia, Mexico, Peru, and Uruguay)

This material is for use with an institutional investor or a qualified investor only. All information contained herein is confidential and is for the exclusive use and review of the intended addressee, and may not be passed on to any third party. This material is provided for informational purposes only and does not constitute a public offering, solicitation or recommendation to buy or sell for any product, service, security and/or strategy. A decision to invest

should only be made after reading the strategy documentation and conducting in-depth and independent due diligence.

ASIA PACIFIC

Hong Kong: This material is disseminated by Morgan Stanley Asia Limited for use in Hong Kong and shall only be made available to "professional investors" as defined under the Securities and Futures Ordinance of Hong Kong (Cap 571). The contents of this material have not been reviewed nor approved by any regulatory authority including the Securities and Futures Commission in Hong Kong. Accordingly, save where an exemption is available under the relevant law, this material shall not be issued, circulated, distributed, directed at, or made available to, the public in Hong Kong. **Singapore:** This material is disseminated by Morgan Stanley Investment Management Company and should not be considered to be the subject of an invitation for subscription or purchase, whether directly or indirectly, to the public or any member of the public in Singapore other than (i) to an institutional investor under section 304 of the Securities and Futures Act, Chapter 289 of Singapore ("SFA"); (ii) to a "relevant person" (which includes an accredited investor) pursuant to section 305 of the SFA, and such distribution is in accordance with the conditions specified in section 305 of the SFA; or (iii) otherwise pursuant to, and in accordance with the conditions of, any other applicable provision of the SFA. This publication has not been reviewed by the Monetary Authority of Singapore. **Australia:** This material is provided by Morgan Stanley Investment Management (Australia) Pty Ltd ABN 22122040037, AFSL No. 314182 and its affiliates and does not constitute an offer of interests. Morgan Stanley Investment Management (Australia) Pty Limited arranges for MSIM affiliates to provide financial services to Australian wholesale clients. Interests will only be offered in circumstances under which no disclosure is required under the Corporations Act 2001 (Cth) (the "Corporations Act"). Any offer of interests will not purport to be an offer of interests in circumstances under which disclosure is required under the Corporations Act and will only be made to persons who qualify as a "wholesale client" (as defined in the Corporations Act). This material will not be lodged with the Australian Securities and Investments Commission.

Japan: For professional investors, this material is circulated or distributed for informational purposes only. For those who are not professional investors, this material is provided in relation to Morgan Stanley Investment Management (Japan) Co., Ltd. ("MSIMJ")'s business with respect to discretionary investment management agreements ("IMA") and investment advisory agreements ("IAA"). This is not for the purpose of a recommendation or solicitation of transactions or offers any particular financial instruments. Under an IMA, with respect to management of assets of a client, the client prescribes basic management policies in advance and commissions MSIMJ to make all investment decisions based on an analysis of the value, etc. of the securities, and MSIMJ accepts such commission. The client shall delegate to MSIMJ the authorities necessary for making investment. MSIMJ exercises the delegated authorities based on investment decisions of MSIMJ, and the client shall not make individual instructions. All investment profits and losses belong to the clients; principal is not guaranteed. Please consider the investment objectives and nature of risks before investing. As an investment advisory fee for an IAA or an IMA, the amount of assets subject to the contract multiplied by a certain rate (the upper limit is 2.20% per annum (including tax)) shall be incurred in proportion to the contract period. For some strategies, a contingency fee may be incurred in addition to the fee mentioned above. Indirect charges also may be incurred, such as brokerage commissions for incorporated securities. Since these charges and expenses are different depending on a contract and other factors, MSIMJ cannot present the rates, upper limits, etc. in advance. All clients should read the Documents Provided Prior to the Conclusion of a Contract carefully before executing an agreement. This material is disseminated in Japan by MSIMJ, Registered No. 410 (Director of Kanto Local Finance Bureau (Financial Instruments Firms)), Membership: the Japan Securities Dealers Association, The Investment Trusts Association, Japan, the Japan Investment Advisers Association and the Type II Financial Instruments Firms Association.

CRC 5611515 Exp. 4/30/2024