

Fed upgrades growth forecasts and starts balance sheet normalization

As widely expected, the Federal Reserve kept unchanged the fed funds rate at 1.00-1.25%. The Fed acknowledged improving economic data such as a strengthening labour market, continued expansion in household spending and a pick-up of business investment. But it was still concerned about below-target inflation. It sees a temporary increase for inflation due to a hurricane-related gasoline price spike, but expects inflation will remain somewhat below 2% over the near term and stabilize around 2% "in the medium term". The Fed views risks to the economic outlook as "roughly balanced". There was mention of the devastation caused by hurricanes, but the Fed was quick to point out that "past experience suggests that the storms are unlikely to materially alter the course of the national economy over the medium term". The Fed continues to expect economic conditions will evolve in a manner that "will warrant gradual increases in the federal funds rate".

The Fed made it official in today's statement that it will start the process of reducing the size of its balance sheet in October. Proceeds received from principal payments on its bond holdings will be reinvested, but only to the extent that the principal payment exceeds gradually rising caps as detailed in a separate statement last June: For Treasuries, the cap is \$6 bn/month, to be increased by \$6 bn every three months until hitting \$30 bn/month. For agency debt and MBS the cap is \$4bn/month, but will increase in steps of \$4 bn every three months until hitting \$20 bn/month.

The decision was unanimous within the FOMC.

Fed's new economic projections:

The central tendency forecast for real GDP growth (Q4/Q4) was raised for 2017 to 2.2-2.5% (versus 2.1-2.2% previously) and for 2018 to 2.0-2.3% (versus 1.8-2.2% previously), and was little changed for 2019 at 1.7-2.1% (versus 1.8-2.2% previously). The central tendency projections for the unemployment rate was left little changed at 4.2-4.3% for 2017 (4.2-4.3% previously), 4.0-4.2% for 2018 (4.0-4.3% previously), but lowered for 2019 to 3.9-4.4% (4.1-4.4% previously). For the first time, the Fed presented its projections for 2020, with growth in that year expected to be in the range 1.6-2.0% while the unemployment rate is expected to be between 4.0 and 4.5%. Inflation forecasts were nudged down slightly for 2017.

The dot plots still point to one additional rate hike this year and three in 2018 (although there are now two members, up from just one last June, who see no rate hike next year). For 2019 and 2020, the dot plots show very little consensus among participants (see dot plots below).

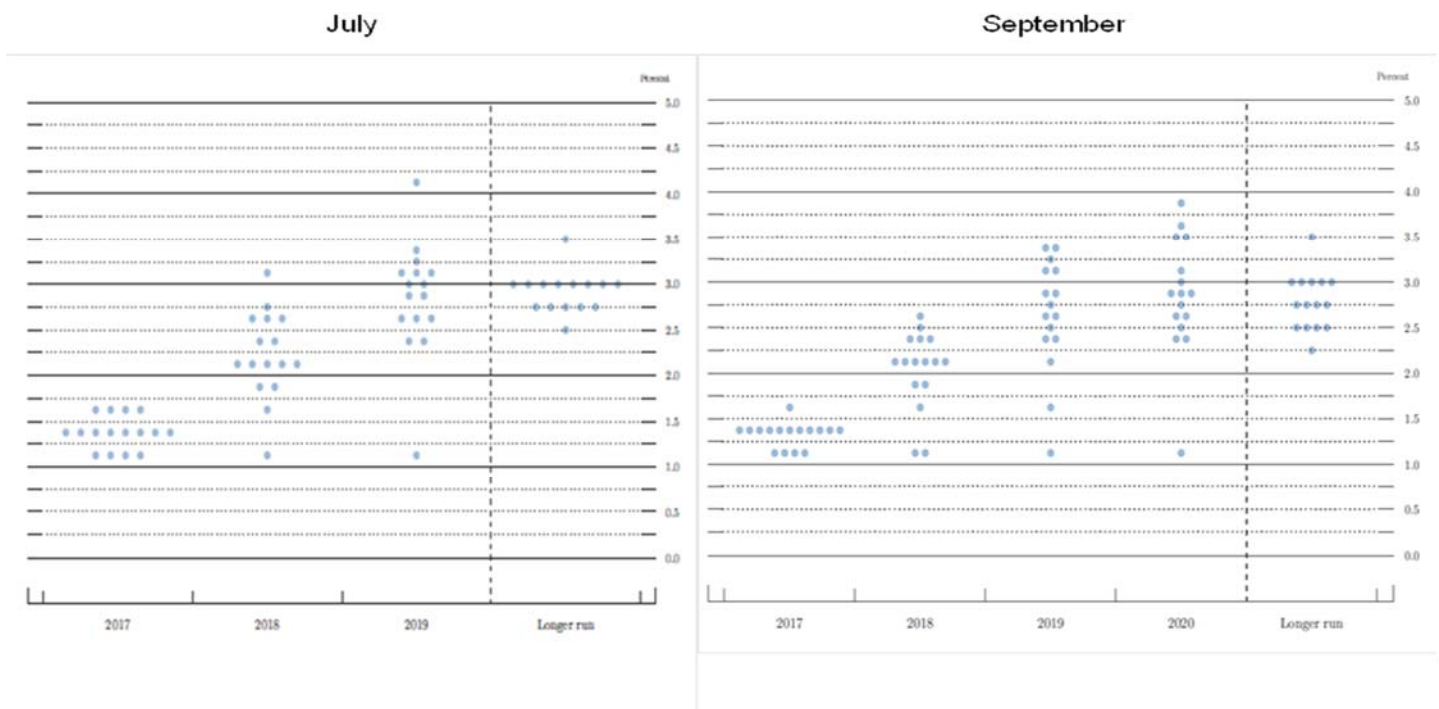
Press conference:

In her press conference, Chair Yellen pointed out that the decision to raise rates earlier this year and to announce that balance sheet normalization was taken because the FOMC is confident the economy is doing well and does not require as much monetary policy stimulus anymore. Yet, Chair Yellen, like many economists, was unsure why inflation remains low. If the factors that are keeping inflation low prove to be more permanent than expected, the path of the fed funds rate will be revised accordingly. However, according to Chair Yellen the bar is high to reverse the decision regarding the balance sheet shrinkage. The chair repeated that the fed funds rate remains the primary tool of monetary policy. Reinvestment would only be considered if there was a threat of returning to the zero lower bound. Chair Yellen also mentioned that the FOMC could use other tools such as forward guidance if needed. Regarding her own future, Chair Yellen limited herself to say that she intends to serve her full mandate.

Bottom line:

The decision to shrink the balance sheet and leave rates unchanged came as no surprise. The Fed maintained a positive view on the economy as evidenced by upgrades to its growth forecasts, and it left the door open for higher rates ahead. However, persistently low inflation remains a problem. The Fed is more optimistic than markets, expecting four rate hikes by the end of 2018 (versus just one expected by markets). Our own forecast is sandwiched between those two views, because we anticipate three additional hikes until the end of next year.

Krishen Rangasamy/Paul-André Pinsonnault



Economic projections of Federal Reserve Board members and Federal Reserve Bank presidents under their individual assessments of projected appropriate monetary policy, September 2017
Advance release of table 1 of the Summary of Economic Projections to be released with the FOMC minutes

Variable	Median ¹					Central tendency ²					Range ³				
	2017	2018	2019	2020	Longer run	2017	2018	2019	2020	Longer run	2017	2018	2019	2020	Longer run
Change in real GDP	2.4	2.1	2.0	1.8	1.8	2.2-2.5	2.0-2.3	1.7-2.1	1.6-2.0	1.8-2.0	2.2-2.7	1.7-2.6	1.4-2.3	1.4-2.0	1.5-2.2
June projection	2.2	2.1	1.9	n.a.	1.8	2.1-2.2	1.8-2.2	1.8-2.0	n.a.	1.8-2.0	2.0-2.5	1.7-2.3	1.4-2.3	n.a.	1.5-2.2
Unemployment rate	4.3	4.1	4.1	4.2	4.6	4.2-4.3	4.0-4.2	3.9-4.4	4.0-4.5	4.5-4.8	4.2-4.5	3.9-4.5	3.8-4.5	3.8-4.8	4.4-5.0
June projection	4.3	4.2	4.2	n.a.	4.6	4.2-4.3	4.0-4.3	4.1-4.4	n.a.	4.5-4.8	4.1-4.5	3.9-4.5	3.8-4.5	n.a.	4.5-5.0
PCE inflation	1.6	1.9	2.0	2.0	2.0	1.5-1.6	1.8-2.0	2.0	2.0-2.1	2.0	1.5-1.7	1.7-2.0	1.8-2.2	1.9-2.2	2.0
June projection	1.6	2.0	2.0	n.a.	2.0	1.6-1.7	1.8-2.0	2.0-2.1	n.a.	2.0	1.5-1.8	1.7-2.1	1.8-2.2	n.a.	2.0
Core PCE inflation ⁴	1.5	1.9	2.0	2.0		1.5-1.6	1.8-2.0	2.0	2.0-2.1		1.4-1.7	1.7-2.0	1.8-2.2	1.9-2.2	
June projection	1.7	2.0	2.0	n.a.		1.6-1.7	1.8-2.0	2.0-2.1	n.a.		1.6-1.8	1.7-2.1	1.8-2.2	n.a.	
Memo: Projected appropriate policy path															
Federal funds rate	1.4	2.1	2.7	2.9	2.8	1.1-1.4	1.9-2.4	2.4-3.1	2.5-3.5	2.5-3.0	1.1-1.6	1.1-2.6	1.1-3.4	1.1-3.9	2.3-3.5
June projection	1.4	2.1	2.9	n.a.	3.0	1.1-1.6	1.9-2.6	2.6-3.1	n.a.	2.8-3.0	1.1-1.6	1.1-3.1	1.1-4.1	n.a.	2.5-3.5

Here is the Fed's statement (emphasis is ours):

Information received since the Federal Open Market Committee met in July indicates that **the labor market has continued to strengthen and that economic activity has been rising moderately so far this year**. Job gains have remained solid in recent months, and the unemployment rate has stayed low. Household spending has been expanding at a moderate rate, and growth in business fixed investment has picked up in recent quarters. On a 12-month basis, **overall inflation and the measure excluding food and energy prices have declined this year and are running below 2 percent**. Market-based measures of inflation compensation remain low; survey-based measures of longer-term inflation expectations are little changed, on balance.

Consistent with its statutory mandate, the Committee seeks to foster maximum employment and price stability. Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria have devastated many communities, inflicting severe hardship. **Storm-related disruptions and rebuilding will affect economic activity in the near term, but past experience suggests that the storms are unlikely to materially alter the course of the national economy over the medium term**. Consequently, the Committee continues to expect that, with gradual adjustments in the stance of monetary policy, economic activity will expand at a moderate pace, and labor market conditions will strengthen somewhat further. **Higher prices for gasoline and some other items in the aftermath of the hurricanes will likely boost inflation temporarily; apart from that effect, inflation on a 12-month basis is expected to remain somewhat below 2 percent in the near term but to stabilize around the Committee's 2 percent objective over the medium term**. Near-term risks to the economic outlook appear roughly balanced, but the Committee is monitoring inflation developments closely.

In view of realized and expected labor market conditions and inflation, **the Committee decided to maintain the target range for the federal funds rate at 1 to 1-1/4 percent**. The stance of monetary policy remains accommodative, thereby supporting some further strengthening in labor market conditions and a sustained return to 2 percent inflation.

In determining the timing and size of future adjustments to the target range for the federal funds rate, the Committee will assess realized and expected economic conditions relative to its objectives of maximum employment and 2 percent inflation. This assessment will take into account a wide range of information, including measures of labor market conditions, indicators of inflation pressures and inflation expectations, and readings on financial and international developments. The Committee will carefully monitor actual and expected inflation developments relative to its symmetric inflation goal. The Committee expects that economic conditions will evolve in a manner that will warrant gradual increases in the federal funds rate; the federal funds rate is likely to remain, for some time, below levels that are expected to prevail in the longer run. However, the actual path of the federal funds rate will depend on the economic outlook as informed by incoming data.

In October, the Committee will initiate the balance sheet normalization program described in the June 2017 Addendum to the Committee's Policy Normalization Principles and Plans.

Voting for the FOMC monetary policy action were: Janet L. Yellen, Chair; William C. Dudley, Vice Chairman; Lael Brainard; Charles L. Evans; Stanley Fischer; Patrick Harker; Robert S. Kaplan; Neel Kashkari; and Jerome H. Powell..

FED Policy Monitor

Economics and Strategy

Montreal Office

514-879-2529

Stéfane Marion

Chief Economist and Strategist
stefane.marion@nbc.ca

Paul-André Pinsonnault

Senior Fixed Income Economist
paulandre.pinsonnault@nbc.ca

Krishen Rangasamy

Senior Economist
krishen.rangasamy@nbc.ca

Marc Pinsonneault

Senior Economist
marc.pinsonneault@nbc.ca

Matthieu Arseneau

Senior Economist
matthieu.arseneau@nbc.ca

Angelo Katsoras

Geopolitical Analyst
angelo.katsoras@nbc.ca

Kyle Dahms

Economist
kyle.dahms@nbc.ca

Jocelyn Paquet

Economist
jocelyn.paquet@nbc.ca

Toronto Office

416-869-8598

Warren Lovely

MD, Public Sector Research and Strategy
warren.lovely@nbc.ca

General – National Bank Financial (NBF) is an indirect wholly owned subsidiary of National Bank of Canada. National Bank of Canada is a public company listed on Canadian stock exchanges.

The particulars contained herein were obtained from sources which we believe to be reliable but are not guaranteed by us and may be incomplete. The opinions expressed are based upon our analysis and interpretation of these particulars and are not to be construed as a solicitation or offer to buy or sell the securities mentioned herein.

Research Analysts – The Research Analyst(s) who prepare these reports certify that their respective report accurately reflects his or her personal opinion and that no part of his/her compensation was, is, or will be directly or indirectly related to the specific recommendations or views as to the securities or companies.

NBF compensates its Research Analysts from a variety of sources. The Research Department is a cost centre and is funded by the business activities of NBF including, Institutional Equity Sales and Trading, Retail Sales, the correspondent clearing business, and Corporate and Investment Banking. Since the revenues from these businesses vary, the funds for research compensation vary. No one business line has a greater influence than any other for Research Analyst compensation.

Canadian Residents – In respect of the distribution of this report in Canada, NBF accepts responsibility for its contents. To make further inquiry related to this report, Canadian residents should contact their NBF professional representative. To effect any transaction, Canadian residents should contact their NBF Investment advisor.

U.S. Residents – With respect to the distribution of this report in the United States, National Bank of Canada Financial Inc. (NBCFI) is regulated by the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority (FINRA) and a member of the Securities Investor Protection Corporation (SIPC). This report has been prepared in whole or in part by, research analysts employed by non-US affiliates of NBCFI that are not registered as broker/dealers in the US. These non-US research analysts are not registered as associated persons of NBCFI and are not licensed or qualified as research analysts with FINRA or any other US regulatory authority and, accordingly, may not be subject (among other things) to FINRA restrictions regarding communications by a research analyst with the subject company, public appearances by research analysts and trading securities held a research analyst account.

All of the views expressed in this research report accurately reflect the research analysts' personal views regarding any and all of the subject securities or issuers. No part of the analysts' compensation was, is, or will be, directly or indirectly, related to the specific recommendations or views expressed in this research report. The analyst responsible for the production of this report certifies that the views expressed herein reflect his or her accurate personal and technical judgment at the moment of publication. Because the views of analysts may differ, members of the National Bank Financial Group may have or may in the future issue reports that are inconsistent with this report, or that reach conclusions different from those in this report. To make further inquiry related to this report, United States residents should contact their NBCFI registered representative.

UK Residents – In respect of the distribution of this report to UK residents, National Bank Financial Inc. has approved the contents (including, where necessary, for the purposes of Section 21(1) of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000). National Bank Financial Inc. and/or its parent and/or any companies within or affiliates of the National Bank of Canada group and/or any of their directors, officers and employees may have or may have had interests or long or short positions in, and may at any time make purchases and/or sales as principal or agent, or may act or may have acted as market maker in the relevant investments or related investments discussed in this report, or may act or have acted as investment and/or commercial banker with respect thereto. The value of investments can go down as well as up. Past performance will not necessarily be repeated in the future. The investments contained in this report are not available to retail customers. This report does not constitute or form part of any offer for sale or subscription of or solicitation of any offer to buy or subscribe for the securities described herein nor shall it or any part of it form the basis of or be relied on in connection with any contract or commitment whatsoever.

This information is only for distribution to Eligible Counterparties and Professional Clients in the United Kingdom within the meaning of the rules of the Financial Conduct Authority. National Bank Financial Inc. is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority and has its registered office at 71 Fenchurch Street, London, EC3M 4HD.

National Bank Financial Inc. is not authorised by the Prudential Regulation Authority and the Financial Conduct Authority to accept deposits in the United Kingdom.

HK Residents – With respect to the distribution of this report in Hong Kong by NBC Financial Markets Asia Limited ("NBCFMA") which is licensed by the Securities and Futures Commission ("SFC") to conduct Type 1 (dealing in securities) regulated activity, the contents of this report are solely for informational purposes. It has not been approved by, reviewed by, verified by or filed with any regulator in Hong Kong. Nothing herein is a recommendation, advice, offer or solicitation to buy or sell a product or service, nor an official confirmation of any transaction. None of the products issuers, NBCFMA or its affiliates or other persons or entities named herein are obliged to notify you of changes to any information and none of the foregoing assume any loss suffered by you in reliance of such information.

The content of this report may contain information about investment products which are not authorized by SFC for offering to the public in Hong Kong and such information will only be available to, those persons who are Professional Investors (as defined in the Securities and Futures Ordinance of Hong Kong ("SFO")). If you are in any doubt as to your status you should consult a financial adviser or contact us. This material is not meant to be marketing materials and is not intended for public distribution. Please note that neither this material nor the product referred to is authorized for sale by SFC. Please refer to product prospectus for full details.

There may be conflicts of interest relating to NBCFMA or its affiliates' businesses. These activities and interests include potential multiple advisory, transactional and financial and other interests in securities and instruments that may be purchased or sold by NBCFMA or its affiliates, or in other investment vehicles which are managed by NBCFMA or its affiliates that may purchase or sell such securities and instruments.

No other entity within the National Bank of Canada group, including NBF, is licensed or registered with the SFC. Accordingly, such entities and their employees are not permitted and do not intend to: (i) carry on a business in any regulated activity in Hong Kong; (ii) hold themselves out as carrying on a business in any regulated activity in Hong Kong; or (iii) actively market their services to the Hong Kong public.

Copyright – This report may not be reproduced in whole or in part, or further distributed or published or referred to in any manner whatsoever, nor may the information, opinions or conclusions contained in it be referred to without in each case the prior express written consent of National Bank Financial.