

Breed's Hill Newsletter

Planning Your Financial Future

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Almost Nine Out of Ten Women Qualify for Social Security on Their Own

Because of a long-term rise in the employment rate for women of all ages, the percentage of women ages 62 to 64 who are fully insured for Social Security retirement benefits based on their own work records has increased significantly since 1980.



To qualify for Social Security benefits, people must work in jobs where they pay Social Security taxes and earn Social Security credits (one per quarter, up to four per year). Most people need 40 credits (the equivalent of 10 years of work) to become fully insured for Social Security retirement benefits.

Source: Social Security Administration, 2020

Printing Money: The Fed's Bond-Buying Program

The Federal Reserve's unprecedented efforts to support the U.S economy during the COVID-19 pandemic include a commitment by the Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) to purchase Treasury securities and agency mortgage-backed securities "in the amounts needed to support smooth market functioning and effective transmission of monetary policy."¹

The Fed buys and sells Treasury securities as part of its regular operations and added mortgage-backed securities to its portfolio during the Great Recession, but the essentially unlimited commitment underscores the severity of the crisis. The Fed is also entering uncharted territory by purchasing corporate, state, and local government bonds and extending other loans to the private sector.

Increasing Liquidity

The Federal Open Market Committee sets interest rates and controls the money supply to support the Fed's dual mandate to promote maximum employment and stable prices, along with its underlying responsibility to promote the stability of the U.S. financial system. By purchasing Treasury securities, the FOMC increases the supply of money in the broader economy, while its purchases of mortgage-backed securities increase supply in the mortgage market. The key to increasing liquidity — called quantitative easing — is that the Fed can make these purchases with funds it creates out of air.

The FOMC purchases the securities through banks within the Federal Reserve System. Rather than using money it already holds on deposit, the Fed adds the appropriate amount to the bank's balance. This provides the bank with more money to lend to consumers, businesses, or the government (through purchasing more government securities). It also empowers the Treasury or mortgage agency to issue additional bonds knowing that the Fed is ready to buy them. The surge of bond buying by the Fed that began in March helped the Treasury to finance its massive stimulus program in response to the coronavirus.

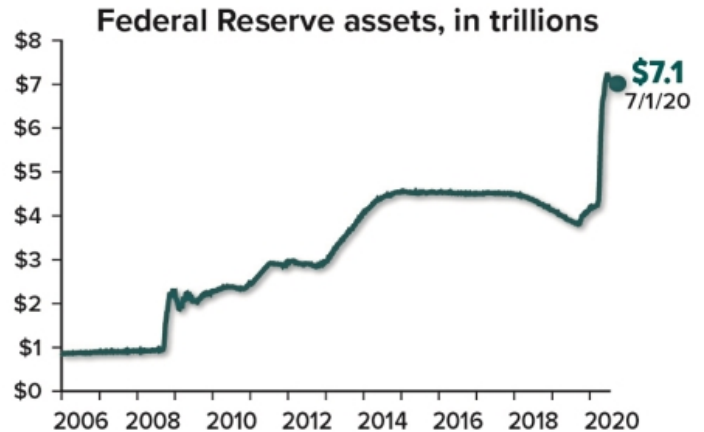
By law, the Fed returns its net interest income to the Treasury, so the Treasury securities are essentially interest-free loans. The principal must be paid when the bond matures, and the bonds add to the national debt. But the Treasury issues new bonds as it pays off the old ones, thus shifting the ever-growing debt forward.

Protecting Against Inflation

Considering the seemingly endless need for government spending and private lending, you may wonder why the Fed doesn't just create an endless supply of money. The controlling factor is the potential for inflation if there is too much money in the economy.

Big Balance Sheet

The Federal Reserve's assets grew with quantitative easing during and after the Great Recession. In late 2018, the Fed began to reverse the process by allowing bonds to mature without replacing them, only to back off when markets reacted negatively to the move. The 2020 emergency measures quickly pushed the balance sheet over \$7 trillion.



Source: Federal Reserve, 2020

Low interest rates and "money printing" led to high inflation after World War II and during the 1970s, but the current situation is different.² Inflation has been low for more than a decade, and the economic crisis has severely curtailed consumer spending, making inflation unlikely in the near term.

The longer-term potential for inflation remains, however, and the Fed does not want to increase the money supply more than necessary to meet the crisis. From a peak of \$75 billion in daily Treasury purchases during the second half of March, the FOMC began to gradually reduce the purchase pace in early April. By mid-June, it was down to an average of \$4 billion per day and scheduled to continue at that pace through mid-August, with further adjustments as necessary in response to economic conditions.³

U.S. Treasury securities are backed by the full faith and credit of the U.S. government as to the timely payment of principal and interest. The principal value of Treasury securities fluctuates with market conditions. If not held to maturity, they could be worth more or less than the original amount paid.

1) Federal Reserve, March 23, 2020

2) *The Wall Street Journal*, April 27, 2020

3) Federal Reserve Bank of New York, 2020

Four Questions on the Roth Five-Year Rule

The Roth "five-year rule" typically refers to when you can take tax-free distributions of earnings from your Roth IRA, Roth 401(k), or other work-based Roth account. The rule states that you must wait five years after making your first contribution, and the distribution must take place after age 59½, when you become disabled, or when your beneficiaries inherit the assets after your death. Roth IRAs (but not workplace plans) also permit up to a \$10,000 tax-free withdrawal of earnings after five years for a first-time home purchase.

While this seems straightforward, several nuances may affect your distribution's tax status. Here are four questions that examine some of them.

1. When does the clock start ticking?

"Five-year rule" is a bit misleading; in some cases, the waiting period may be shorter. The countdown begins on January 1 of the tax year for which you make your first contribution.

For example, if you open a Roth IRA on December 31, 2020, the clock starts on January 1, 2020, and ends on January 1, 2025 — four years and one day after making your first contribution. Even if you wait until April 15, 2021, to make your contribution for tax year 2020, the clock starts on January 1, 2020.

2. Does the five-year rule apply to every account?

For Roth IRAs, the five-year clock starts ticking when you make your first contribution to any Roth IRA.

With employer plans, each account you own is subject to a separate five-year rule. However, if you roll assets from a former employer's 401(k) plan into your current Roth 401(k), the clock depends on when you made the first contribution to your former account. For instance, if you first contributed to your former Roth 401(k) in 2014, and in 2020 you rolled those assets into your new plan, the new account meets the five-year requirement.

Roth by the Numbers

19%

U.S. households who owned Roth IRAs in 2019



36%

Roth IRA-owning households who contributed to them for tax year 2018



69%

Employers that offered a Roth 401(k) plan in 2018



23%

Eligible employees who contributed to a Roth 401(k) in 2018



3. What if you roll over from a Roth 401(k) to a Roth IRA?

Proceed with caution here. If you have never previously contributed to a Roth IRA, the clock resets when you roll money into the Roth IRA, regardless of how long the money has been in your Roth 401(k). Therefore, if you think you might enact a Roth 401(k) rollover sometime in the future, consider opening a Roth IRA as soon as possible. The five-year clock starts ticking as soon as you make your first contribution, even if it's just the minimum amount and you don't contribute again until you roll over the assets.¹

4. What if you convert from a traditional IRA to a Roth IRA?

In this case, a different five-year rule applies. When you convert funds in a traditional IRA to a Roth IRA, you'll have to pay income taxes on deductible contributions and tax-deferred earnings in the year of the conversion. If you withdraw any of the converted assets within five years, a 10% early-distribution penalty may apply, unless you have reached age 59½ or qualify for another exception. This rule also applies to conversions from employer plans.²

¹ You may also leave the money in your former employer's plan, roll the money into another employer's Roth account, or receive a lump-sum distribution. Income taxes and a 10% penalty tax may apply to the taxable portion of the distribution if it is not qualified.

² Withdrawals that meet the definition of a "coronavirus-related distribution" during 2020 are exempt from the 10% penalty.

Where to Look for Lost Property

U.S. savings bonds were once so popular (and so often tucked away) that an estimated \$25 billion in matured savings bonds have never been claimed. These bonds have been caught in a legal battle between the federal government and states that want to take control of the bonds on behalf of residents.¹

In August 2019, a federal appeals court ruled in favor of the federal government, saying that only the rightful owner could redeem bonds that were missing, stolen, or destroyed (typically by providing serial numbers). However, the Treasury has allowed states to redeem bonds in their physical possession and hold the proceeds for their rightful owner.² As this conflict illustrates, one of the challenges of finding lost property is knowing where to look.

State Programs

Every state has an unclaimed property program that requires companies and financial institutions to turn account assets over to the state if they have lost contact with the rightful owner for one year or longer. The state is then responsible for locating the owner.

For state programs, unclaimed property might include financial accounts, stocks, uncashed dividend and payroll checks, utility deposits, insurance payments and policies, trust distributions, mineral royalty payments, and the contents of safe-deposit boxes. State-held property generally can be claimed in

perpetuity by original owners and heirs.

Most states participate in a national database called Missing Money; searching on MissingMoney.com is free. You might also need to check specific databases for every state where you have lived. For more information, see the National Association of Unclaimed Property Administrators at unclaimed.org.

Federal Programs

Unclaimed property held by federal agencies might include tax refunds, pension funds, funds from failed banks and credit unions, funds owed investors from U.S. SEC enforcement cases, refunds from FHA-insured mortgages, and unredeemed savings bonds that are no longer earning interest. There is no central database for federal agencies, but you can find more information at usa.gov/unclaimed-money.

Proceed with Care

Finding and receiving unclaimed property to which you are entitled should not cost you money. Though there are legitimate companies that may be paid to locate or offer to help rightful owners obtain property for a fee, you do not need to pay them in order to receive the property. Be on the lookout for scammers who claim to have property in order to obtain other information about you or your finances. If you have questions, contact your state's unclaimed property office.

1-2) *The Wall Street Journal*, August 3 and August 13, 2019

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