Markets were volatile to end the 2018 calendar year. Both international and domestic equity markets had considerable losses during the 4th quarter while fixed income returns were muted, but outperformed relative to equities. Within equities, domestic stocks trailed international markets, reversing the 2018 trend of US market strength. Trade tensions between the US and China, midterm elections in US Congress, the effects of ongoing monetary policy tightening by the Federal Reserve (Fed), federal debt ceiling negotiations and the subsequent partial government shutdown outweighed generally positive corporate earnings and macroeconomic data reported during the quarter. The large cap S&P 500 Index returned -13.5% during the quarter while the small cap Russell 2000 Index fell by over 20% for the period. The drop in equity prices over the last three months was enough to take the returns for major US equity indices into negative territory for the 2018 calendar year. Returns over the 1-year period were -4.4% and -11.0% for the S&P 500 and Russell 2000 respectively.

Fixed income securities outperformed equities through both the 4th quarter and calendar year 2018 with the broad market Bloomberg Barclays Aggregate Index returning 1.6% and 0.0% respectively. Interest rates on the US Treasury Yield Curve continued their 2018 flattening trend as short-term rates increased to near-term highs while long-term rates fell during the quarter. Some of the increase in short-term rates can be attributed to the late December Fed interest rate hike. This marked the fourth Fed interest rate increase of 2018. This movement in rates did lead to some short-term rates being higher than those of longer dated maturities. More conservative fixed income sectors such as Treasuries and mortgage backed securities outperformed during the quarter and for the year as investors moved toward the relative safety these securities provide while widening credit spreads acted as a headwind to corporate issues.