JOHNSTON INVESTMENT COUNSEL
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Substantiating Your Charitable Gifts
How to Get a Bigger Social Security Retirement Benefit
Five Things to Know About Inherited IRAs
I'm thinking about asking my parents to move in with me and my family. Is there anything I need to consider?

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Substantiating Your Charitable Gifts

When you claim a federal income tax deduction for charitable contributions, you must substantiate the contributions by maintaining certain records. The records must establish the charity to whom the gift was made, the amount of cash or the type and value of other property donated to charity, whether anything was received in consideration for the contribution, and certain other requirements. The records needed generally depend on the type and value of the property donated; there may be some overlap in requirements. In general, do not attach the records to your income tax return. Keep the records so that you can provide them to the IRS if requested to do so.

Cash contributions

In order to claim a charitable deduction for any contribution of cash, a check, or other monetary gift, you must maintain a record of such contributions through a bank record (such as a cancelled check, a bank or credit union statement, or a credit card statement) or a written communication (such as a receipt or letter) from the charity showing the name of the charity, the date of the contribution, and the amount of the contribution. If you make charitable contributions through payroll deductions, you generally may substantiate the charitable deduction using the charity's pledge card along with either a pay stub, a Form W-2, or some other employer-furnished document showing the amount withheld and paid to charity. If you make a single contribution of $250 or more by payroll deduction, the pledge card or a document from the charity must state that no goods or services were provided in return for the payroll deduction.

All contributions of $250 or more

If you claim a charitable deduction for any contribution of $250 or more, you must substantiate the contribution with a contemporaneous written acknowledgment of the contribution from the charity. The acknowledgment must contain the name of the charity, the amount of any cash contribution, and a reasonably detailed description of any non-cash contribution. The acknowledgment must also include either (1) a statement that no goods and services were provided by the charity in return for the contribution, (2) a good-faith estimate of the value of such goods and services (these reduce the amount of the charitable deduction), or (3) a statement that the goods and services were token benefits or consisted entirely of insubstantial membership benefits or intangible religious benefits. The acknowledgment is considered contemporaneous if you receive it by the earlier of the date on which you file your tax return for the year of the contribution or the due date (including extensions) for the return.

Noncash contributions

If you make any noncash contributions, you must generally get a receipt from the charitable organization with the name of the charitable organization, the date and location of the contribution, and a reasonably detailed description of the property. You must also keep a reliable written record showing the name and address of the charitable organization, the date and location of the contribution, a reasonable detailed description of the property, the fair market value of the property (and how it was determined), the adjusted basis of the property, the amount claimed as a deduction, and the terms of any conditions attached to contribution of the property.

If the value of the contribution is $250 or more, you must also substantiate the contribution with a contemporaneous written acknowledgment of the contribution from the charity as described previously.

If the value of the contribution is over $500, your records must also include how you got the property (e.g., purchase, gift, inheritance, or exchange), when you got the property, and the cost or other basis of the property (including any adjustments).

If you claim a deduction of over $5,000 for a noncash charitable contribution of one item or a group of similar items, you must also obtain a qualified written appraisal of the donated property from a qualified appraiser.

How to Get a Bigger Social Security Retirement Benefit

Sign up for a my Social Security account at [ssa.gov](ssa.gov) to view your online Social Security Statement. It contains a detailed record of your earnings, as well as benefit estimates and other information about Social Security.

[1] Social Security Administration, Annual Statistical Supplement, 2015

Many people decide to begin receiving early Social Security retirement benefits. In fact, according to the Social Security Administration, about 72% of retired workers receive benefits prior to their full retirement age.[1] But waiting longer could significantly increase your monthly retirement income, so weigh your options carefully before making a decision.

Timing counts

Your monthly Social Security retirement benefit is based on your lifetime earnings. Your base benefit--the amount you'll receive at full retirement age--is calculated using a formula that takes into account your 35 highest earnings years.

If you file for retirement benefits before reaching full retirement age (66 to 67, depending on your birth year), your benefit will be permanently reduced. For example, at age 62, each benefit check will be 25% to 30% less than it would have been had you waited and claimed your benefit at full retirement age (see table).

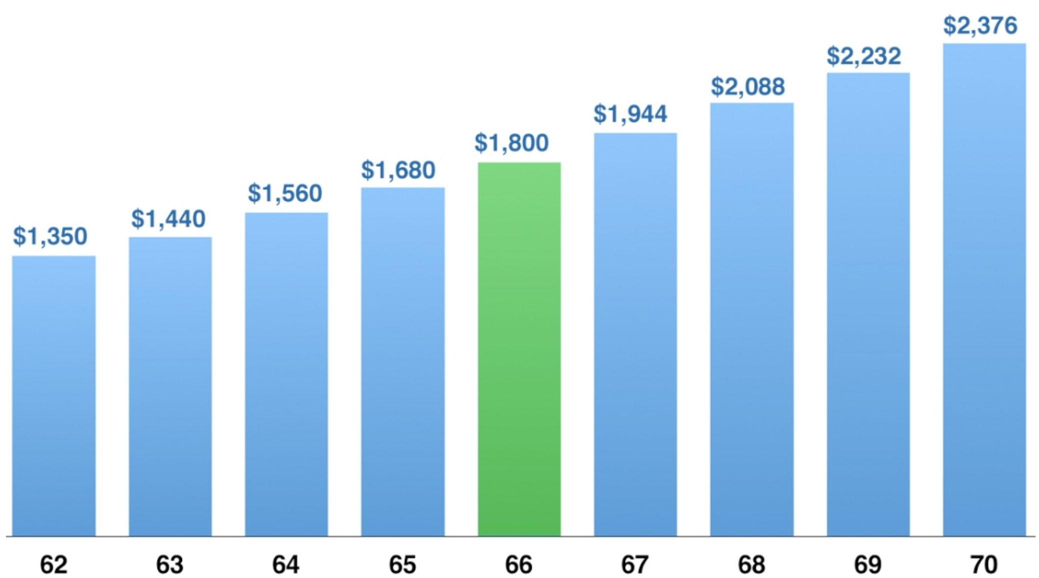
Alternatively, if you postpone filing for benefits past your full retirement age, you'll earn delayed retirement credits for each month you wait, up until age 70. Delayed retirement credits will increase the amount you receive by about 8% per year if you were born in 1943 or later.

The chart below shows how a monthly benefit of $1,800 at full retirement age (66) would be affected if claimed as early as age 62 or as late as age 70. This is a hypothetical example used for illustrative purposes only; your benefits and results will vary.

Birth year	Full retirement age	Percentage reduction at age 62
1943-1954	66	25%
1955	66 and 2 months	25.83%
1956	66 and 4 months	26.67%
1957	66 and 6 months	27.50%
1958	66 and 8 months	28.33%
1959	66 and 10 months	29.17%
1960 or later	67	30%

Early or late?

Should you begin receiving Social Security benefits early, or wait until full retirement age or even longer? If you absolutely need the money right away, your decision is clear-cut; otherwise, there's no "right" answer. But take time to make an informed, well-reasoned decision. Consider factors such as how much retirement income you'll need, your life expectancy, how your spouse or survivors might be affected, whether you plan to work after you start receiving benefits, and how your income taxes might be affected.



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Five Things to Know About Inherited IRAs

You are generally not the "owner" of an inherited IRA. The practical result of this fact is that you can't mix inherited IRA funds with your own IRA funds, and you can't make 60-day rollovers to and from the inherited IRA. Spousal beneficiaries, however, may be able to assume actual ownership of an inherited IRA.

****If the traditional IRA owner died after age 70-1/2 and did not take an RMD for the year of his or her death, you must also withdraw any remaining RMD amount for that year.***

When an IRA owner dies, the IRA proceeds are payable to the named beneficiary--or to the owner's estate if no beneficiary is named. If you've been designated as the beneficiary of a traditional or Roth IRA, it's important that you understand the special rules that apply to "inherited IRAs."

It's not really "your" IRA

As an initial matter, while you do have certain rights, you are generally not the "owner" of an inherited IRA. The practical result of this fact is that you can't mix inherited IRA funds with your own IRA funds, and you can't make 60-day rollovers to and from the inherited IRA. You also need to calculate the taxable portion of any payment from the inherited IRA separately from your own IRAs, and you need to determine the amount of any required minimum distributions (RMDs) from the inherited IRA separately from your own IRAs.

But if you inherited the IRA from your spouse, you have special options. You can take ownership of the IRA funds by rolling them into your own IRA or into an eligible retirement plan account. If you're the sole beneficiary, you can also leave the funds in the inherited IRA and treat it as your own IRA. In either case, the IRA will be yours and no longer treated as an inherited IRA. As the new IRA *owner* (as opposed to *beneficiary*), you won't need to begin taking RMDs from a traditional IRA until you reach age 70½, and you won't need to take RMDs from a Roth IRA during your lifetime at all. And as IRA owner, you can also name new beneficiaries of your choice.

Required minimum distributions

As beneficiary of an inherited IRA--traditional or Roth--you must begin taking RMDs after the owner's death.* In general, you must take payments from the IRA annually, over your life expectancy, starting no later than December 31 of the year following the year the IRA owner died. But if you're a spousal beneficiary, you may be able to delay payments until the year the IRA owner would have reached age 70½.

In some cases you may be able to satisfy the RMD rules by withdrawing the entire balance of the inherited IRA (in one or more payments) by the fifth anniversary of the owner's death. In almost every situation, though, it makes sense to use the life expectancy method instead--to stretch payments out as long as possible and take maximum advantage of the IRA's tax-deferral benefit.

You can always elect to receive more than the required amount in any given year, but if you receive less than the required amount you'll be subject to a federal penalty tax equal to 50% of the difference between the required distribution and the amount actually distributed.

More stretching...

What happens if you elect to take distributions over your life expectancy but you die with funds still in the inherited IRA? This is where your IRA custodial/trustee agreement becomes crucial. If, as is sometimes the case, your IRA language doesn't address what happens when you die, then the IRA balance is typically paid to your estate--ending the IRA tax deferral.

Many IRA providers, though, allow you to name a successor beneficiary. In this case, when you die, your successor beneficiary "steps into your shoes" and can continue to take RMDs over your remaining distribution schedule.

Federal income taxes

Distributions from inherited IRAs are subject to federal income taxes, except for any Roth or nondeductible contributions the owner made. But distributions are never subject to the 10% early distribution penalty, even if you haven't yet reached age 59½. (This is one reason why a surviving spouse may decide to remain as beneficiary rather than taking ownership of an inherited IRA.)

When you take a distribution from an inherited Roth IRA, the owner's nontaxable Roth contributions are deemed to come out first, followed by any earnings. Earnings are also tax-free if made after a five-calendar-year holding period, starting with the year the IRA owner first contributed to any Roth IRA. For example, if the IRA owner first contributed to a Roth IRA in 2014 and died in 2016, any earnings distributed from the IRA after 2018 will be tax-free.

Creditor protection

Traditional and Roth IRAs are protected under federal law if you declare bankruptcy. The IRA bankruptcy exemption was originally an inflation-adjusted $1 million, which has since grown to $1,283,025. Unfortunately, the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that inherited IRAs are not covered by this exemption. (If you inherit an IRA from your spouse and treat that IRA as your own, it's possible that the IRA won't be considered an inherited IRA for bankruptcy purposes, but this was not specifically addressed by the Court.) This means that your inherited IRA won't receive any protection under federal law if you declare bankruptcy. However, the laws of your particular state may still protect those assets, in full or in part, and may provide protection from creditors outside of bankruptcy as well.

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I'm thinking about asking my parents to move in with me and my family. Is there anything I need to consider?

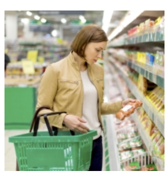
Many members of the "sandwich generation"--a group loosely defined as people in their 40s to 60s who are "sandwiched" between caring for their own children and aging parents--find themselves in the position of raising a family and looking after the needs of aging parents. If the time has come when you and your parents think that it may be in their best interest to live with you, you should discuss the implications and how it will impact your entire family.

Your first topic should be to have all your family members share their expectations for living together. No doubt your parents will want to feel part of your household. However, you'll want to know how much they want to participate in day-to-day activities in your home. For example, if able, would they be willing to take on some responsibilities, such as babysitting and transporting kids to school or other activities? Will they participate in other family activities, such as meals and social events?

Next, consider whether your home can properly accommodate your parents. Do you have adequate privacy/space for your parents, or will you need to remodel or renovate an existing area of your home? Will your parents be able to move around your home easily, or do you need to install appropriate safety devices? Common modifications and repairs for aging family members may include grab bars in bathrooms, an automatic chair lift for stairs, and a ramp for wheelchair access.

You will also need to explore the financial impact. Will your parents contribute to household expenses, or will you cover their portion? Do they have enough money to help support themselves during their retirement? If not, will you be able to support them financially?

While having multiple generations living together in the same home can be a rewarding experience, it can also be challenging at times. As a result, it's important to keep the lines of communication open between you, your spouse, your children, and your parents. Doing so can help ensure a happy and healthy home environment for your entire multigenerational family.



What is the most important component of GDP in the United States?

We often hear in the media that consumer spending is crucial to the overall health of the U.S. economy, but exactly *how* important is it? Representing approximately two-thirds of overall GDP, consumption--the almighty consumer--is the largest driver of economic growth in the United States. Of the nearly $18 trillion in U.S. GDP (2015), American shoppers are responsible for a piece of the pie worth about $12 trillion.

Consumption is tracked by the Bureau of Economic Analysis, and is reported as Personal Consumption Expenditures (PCE) in its monthly "Personal Income and Outlays" news release. Since the late 1960s, PCE as a percentage of overall GDP has crept up from a low of approximately 58% to nearly 70% today.

PCE is divided into goods and services. The services category typically represents the largest part of PCE, accounting for more than 65% over the past two years. Examples of services include health care, utilities, recreation, and financial services.

Goods are broken down further into durable and nondurable goods. Durable goods are those that have an average life of at least three years. Examples include cars, appliances and furniture. Nondurable goods are those with an average life span of less than three years and include such items as clothing, food, and gasoline.

Durable goods represent approximately 10% of total PCE, while nondurable goods make up about 20%.

So the next time you're out shopping, for anything from a bottle of ketchup to a new car, consider that you're doing your part to fuel our nation's growth.

Sources: World Bank.org, accessed June 2016; Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, 2016; Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2016

Follow the Money

Who's going to win the U.S. Presidential election in November? If history is a reliable guide, it will be the candidate who raises the most money during the campaign season. The last time the candidate who raised the most money lost was Gerald Ford vs. Jimmy Carter in 1976. Ever since, the money determined the winner.

The accompanying chart tells the story, and the first thing you notice is how much more money the recent Presidential campaigns raised (and spent) than those back in the 1960s through 1990s. The Obama campaigns greatly outraised the McCain and Romney candidacies, and George W. Bush outraised Al Gore and John Kerry in their electoral contests.

So far, the Clinton campaign is outraising Team Trump by a 3:1 margin.

Source:

- http://www.forbes.com/sites/niallmccarthy/2016/07/28/how-much-does-money-matter-in-u-s-presidential-elections-infographic/#66c6e84d7c14

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High Pay for Underperformance

It would seem obvious that companies that do well—enjoy better profits and deliver higher returns to their shareholders—would pay their CEOs more, while companies that didn't fare as well would pay less.

It would also be wrong.

A study by MSCI's corporate governance research group has found that companies that paid their CEOs above the median for all comparable CEOs performed less well than those who compensated their CEOs at or below the median.

Looking at 10 years of data for more than 800 CEOs at 429 large public companies, the group found that between 2006 and 2015 $100 invested in the 20% of companies that paid their CEOs the most yielded a total dollar value of $264.76. If you put the same $100 in the 20% of companies that paid their CEOs the least, you would have ended up with $367.17. These results include both capital gains (movements in the share price) and dividends.

The researchers concluded that the higher-compensated executives might be focusing more of their attention on short-term rather than long-term results. They argue that it's time to rethink and restructure CEO compensation—and perhaps recognize that the people at the top may not be quite as important as they (and their hand-picked compensation committee) think they are.

Source:

- http://www.forbes.com/sites/monicawang/2016/08/01/time-to-rethink-ceo-compensation-those-with-higher-pay-and-equity-lead-worse-performing-companies/?utm_source=TWITTER&utm_medium=social&utm_content=534225689&utm_campaign=sprinklrForbes#fb21826300a0

Self-Driving Liability Coverage

You hear about how technology is disrupting entire industries, but one that sees disruption coming most clearly is the auto insurance companies. Eventually, perhaps within ten years, automobiles will be driving themselves, and the common assumption is that there will be fewer accidents. But what, exactly, will the industry be insuring: drivers or computer code? How likely will accidents be with this new technology? How much will each accident cost in repairs and human medical expenses?

Today, actuaries can estimate how many billions of miles will be driven by American automobiles, and how many accidents and fatalities will result. The current statistic in America is one fatality for every 94 million miles driven. There are breakdowns by age, gender and location. Actuaries know that certain people are more likely to be involved in wrecks, and engage in riskier behavior, than others.

But they have no idea, currently, how to assess the difference in potential accident rates between a self-driving Tesla, a Lexis and a Sonata. All they know for certain is that Tesla's Autopilot has driven owners and their families 130 million miles—with one fatality so far. One would assume that the software and sensing equipment are going to improve over the coming decade. But insurance companies also believe that each accident will cost more due to the high-tech parts needed for auto-driving.

Currently, the insurance industry takes in $200 billion worth of premiums. Estimates vary, but up to 80% of that amount could disappear in the driverless car revolution—with a comparable reduction in payouts for accidents. Insurance executives, however, are becoming creative, putting new cyber coverage on the drawing board that would protect the car's software and pay if you're somehow hacked while driving. The coverage could also pay for new downloads to your car's computer.

Meanwhile, how will the insurance company determine who, or what, is at fault in an accident? Was the car being controlled by the driver, or was it operating on its own? Most of today's automobiles now have a "black box" under the steering wheel which monitors the driver's activity. These will be enhanced to determine how long it took the computer to transition control of the car to or from the driver, and when that transition occurred, if at all. It could also monitor the health of the car's computer, and could stop the car if it detects malware, a hacker—or a drunk individual trying to take over manual control.

Sources:

http://thinkinghighways.com/driverless-cars-threaten-to-crash-insurers-earnings/

http://www.insure.com/car-insurance/auto-insurers-prepare-for-self-driving-cars.html

The Precedent to Brexit

Before there was "Brexit" there was another painful economic divorce, when the British citizens of the American colonies decided to "Amexit" the British Empire in the 1770s. The Economist magazine took statistics from that era, including long-term government bond yields and stock prices, to see what the "Amexit" shock looked like from an economic standpoint in Britain.

It's usually bad economic news when government bond yields rise dramatically. It means that demand has gone down or investors are uncertain whether they'll get paid back, and (in this case) the British government had to pay more to entice people to invest in the British empire during the time when its army was fighting to subdue the pesky rebels overseas. Similarly, when stock prices go down, it usually means investor confidence is shaken—or, in the case of the accompanying graph, from the year 1770 through the year 1790—apparently shattered.

You can see some of the seminal events noted on the graph, including a downturn following the unrest associated with the Tea Act and the Boston Tea Party, and then a significant downturn in stocks (and upturn in bond rates) after the Revolutionary War started.

Perhaps the most interesting thing about the graph is the fact that normalcy was restored roughly the same time the U.S. finally got its government act together and created the Constitution.

Despite the fact that the British had lost a huge amount of territory and a very promising piece of their future economy, bond rates returned to normal, and the stock market settled down to a few points above where they had been when the whole American independence mess started. In the end, from an investment standpoint, the "Amexit" proved to be a tempest in a teapot.

Source:

- http://ritholtz.com/2016/07/amexit-sent-shockwaves-financial-markets/?utm_source=dlvr.it&utm_medium=twitter

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Breaking the bonds

Britain's market reaction to American independence

Source: Bank of England *Unweighted-average share prices of the Bank of England, East India Company and South Sea Company