

Wall Street opens slightly higher, Dow retakes 18,000 mark

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Wall Street opened slightly higher on Tuesday, with the Dow rising above the 18,000 mark, as investors assess quarterly earnings and await the outcome of a two-day US Federal Reserve meeting.

A rise in oil prices and a 2 per cent rise in Dupont helped the Dow Jones industrial average cross the key psychological barrier.

Markets see no chance of a US interest rate increase at the meeting that is set to begin on Tuesday but have priced in a one-in-five chance of a hike at the meeting on June 14-15. Fed officials have repeatedly said a hike in June is on the cards. While job growth has continued to gain strength, inflation stubbornly remains below the Fed's 2 per cent target.

Investors are also keeping a close eye on earnings reports from major players such as Apple, AT&T, Ebay

First-quarter earnings from S&P 500 components are expected to have fallen 7.3 per cent from a year earlier, according to Thomson Reuters I/B/E/S. Of the 135 companies that have reported, 59 per cent reported revenue above analyst expectations, just short of the average 60 per cent since 2002.

"People are focused on earnings to see if things will pick up in the coming quarters," said Scott Brown, chief economist at Raymond James in St. Petersburg, Florida.

"Right now we're in no man's land. The data has been mixed with job growth picking up but there are concerns regarding the downside risks."

With the S&P 500 up in eight of the past 10 weeks and nearing the record high set almost a year ago, traders are struggling to find reasons to push it even higher as underwhelming earnings and the specter of higher interest rates hover over markets.

At 9:44 a.m. ET (1344 GMT) the Dow Jones industrial average was up 26.23 points, or 0.15 per cent, at 18,003.47, the S&P 500 was up 3.87 points, or 0.19 per cent, at 2,091.66 and the Nasdaq Composite was up 4.86 points, or 0.1 per cent, at 4,900.64.

Seven of the 10 major S&P sectors were higher, with the energy and materials index's 0.5 per cent rise leading the advancers.

Oil prices were up about 1.6 per cent due to a weaker dollar and hopes for an easing of the global oil glut.

Orders for long-lasting US manufactured goods rebounded less than expected in March. The Commerce Department said on Tuesday that orders for durable goods increased 0.8 per cent last month, below the 1.8 per cent rise expected by economists polled by Reuters.

The US Conference Board is expected to report at 10 a.m. ET that its consumer confidence index was little changed at 96.0 in April.

Shares of Apple were down 0.2 per cent at \$104.93. The world's largest public company is expected to report a fall in quarterly revenue on weakened demand for its smartphones.

Whirlpool was down 5.6 per cent at \$175.60 after its profit missed expectations. Advancing issues outnumbered decliners on the NYSE by 1,901 to 769. On the Nasdaq, 1,327 issues rose and 1,020 fell.

The S&P 500 index showed 10 new 52-week highs and 1 new low, while the Nasdaq recorded 15 new highs and 12 new lows.