



NEWS RELEASE

Zacks.com Announces That Kelley Wright Highlights the Following Stocks: Associated Banc-Corp and Atmos Energy

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CHICAGO--(BUSINESS WIRE)--May 10, 2004--In spite of all the challenges facing the market, Kelley Wright says that selective opportunities will exist for nimble investors. Use this expert's investment outlook and stock profiles to find those opportunities in any type of market environment. Read about Associated Banc-Corp (NASDAQ:ASBC) and Atmos Energy (NYSE:ATO). Click here for the full story exclusively on Zacks.com: <http://at.zacks.com/?id=84>

Here are the highlights from the Featured Expert column:

Economics is not a hard science like Physics or Chemistry. Physical scientists work in controlled environments where experiments are repeated under the same conditions. Economists aren't so lucky because each economic cycle is unique and there is no generally agreed upon starting and ending points. Society is also dynamic, which constantly throws curve balls to the most recent established order of things.

Kelley Wright's point is that we expect economics to tell us what it is incapable of telling us, until of course after it has happened. Accordingly we seem to be in a parallel universe where once sacred mathematic and economic principles have been stood on their heads, unless of course they haven't and we simply haven't had sufficient time for the inevitable corrective forces to take control and restore order.

Associated Banc-Corp (NASDAQ:ASBC) was formed in 1970 bringing together many affiliate banks with roots dating back to the late 1800's. Through its subsidiaries, ASBC owns 217 branches in Minnesota, Illinois, and Wisconsin. It is

currently ranked as the number two largest commercial bank based in Wisconsin. Company services include banking, loans, and insurance. As with many of the financial companies Wright and his team follow, rising interest rates are expected to drop off new mortgage origination and thus earnings. As these financial companies redeploy their profits into new areas of operation, the success of diversification will be key to future stability. He expects that short-term earnings during this transitional period may give investors additional opportunity to acquire shares at Undervalue.

Atmos Energy (NYSE:ATO) began its history in the Texas panhandle during 1906. With over 1.7 million customers, it is one of the largest natural gas distributors in the United States. Operations currently encompass a utility segment, a natural gas marketing segment, and a segment primarily responsible for storage services. Though a 4.8% yield is appealing, historically Atmos provides a yield of 5.8% at Undervalue. Additional pressure for a return to Undervalue may come with increasing interest rates. Traditionally, increasing rates cause companies with high debt loads such as Atmos to allocate cash away from things like dividends to meet debt obligations. Based on the current annual dividend of \$1.20, shares will become Undervalued at a price of approximately \$23/share.

Read Kelley Wright's complete market and stock commentaries, along with another company profile, by clicking: <http://at.zacks.com/?id=85>

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