TRAVELERS

The Travelers Companies, Inc.

Fourth Quarter 2016 Results Conference Call

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CORPORATE PARTICIPANTS

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PRESENTATION

Operator
Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to the fourth quarter results teleconference for Travelers. We ask that you hold all questions until the completion of formal remarks, at which time you will be given instructions for the question and answer session. As a reminder, this conference is being recorded on January 24, 2017.

At this time, I would like to turn the conference over to Miss Gabriella Nawi, Senior Vice President of Investor Relations. Miss Nawi, you may begin.

Gabriella Nawi
Thank you. Good morning, and welcome to Travelers' discussion of our 2016 fourth quarter and full-year results. Hopefully, all of you have seen our press release, financial supplement, and webcast presentation released earlier this morning. All of these materials can be found on our website at www.travelers.com under the Investor section. Speaking today will be Alan Schnitzer, Chief Executive Officer; Jay Benet, Vice Chairman and Chief Financial Officer; and Brian MacLean, President and Chief Operating Officer. They will discuss the financial results of our business and the current market environment. They will refer to the webcast presentation as they go through prepared remarks, and then we will take questions.

In addition, other members of senior management are in the room including Michael Klein, Executive Vice President and President Personal Insurance; Tom Kunkel, Executive Vice-President and President Bond and Specialty Insurance; and Greg Toczydlowski, Executive Vice President, and President of Business Insurance.

Before I turn it over to Alan, I would like to draw your attention to the explanatory note included at the end of the webcast. Our presentation today includes forward-looking statements. The company cautions investors that any forward-looking statement involves risks and uncertainties, and it's not a guarantee of future performance. Actual results may differ materially from those projected in the forward-looking statements due to a variety of factors.

These factors are described in our earnings press release and in our most recent 10-Q and 10-K filed with the SEC. We do not undertake any obligation to update forward-looking statements. Also in our remarks, or responses to questions, we may mention some non-GAAP financial measures. Reconciliations are included in our recent earnings press release, financial supplement, and other materials that are available in the Investor section on our website, Travelers.com.

And, now, Alan Schnitzer.

Alan Schnitzer
Thank you, Gabi. Good morning, everyone, and thank you for joining us today. This morning, we released solid underwriting and investment results with record net and operating earnings per share for the quarter. Operating income was $919 million generating an operating return on equity of 16.4%. This brings our full-year operating income to nearly $3 billion and operating return on equity to 13.3%. That's in line with the 13.5% average annual operating ROE we've delivered over the last ten years. During the year, we grew adjusted book value per share by 7% after returning more than $3.2 billion of excess capital to our shareholders.

Overall, our underwriting results for the year were strong as evidenced by our consolidated combined ratio of 92%. Underwriting results in Business and International Insurance were solid, and once again, we posted impressive underwriting results in Bond and Specialty Insurance.

Despite the disappointing impact of higher than expected personal auto bodily injury losses, our Personal Insurance combined ratio for the year was 95.1%, demonstrating the value of having a balanced homeowners and auto personal lines business.

In our commercial business, we continue to be successful in the execution of our marketplace strategies. That resulted in continued historically high levels of retention and positive renewal premium change in the quarter all of which reflects a stable environment. In our core Middle Market business, pure renewal rate change improved by a full point from the third quarter as we continue to execute at a very granular level to achieve our written return objectives. As you'll hear from Brian, in terms of new business, we continue to be quite active in terms of submission and quote activity but also thoughtful in terms of underwriting discipline.

Turning to Personal Insurance, as you've seen, the results by line were mixed. Our homeowners business once again produced excellent results and grew net written premium for the first time since 2011. In our Auto business, we're clearly disappointed by the underwriting result. During the fourth quarter, bodily injury losses were higher than expected, and they developed unfavorably for the first three accident quarters of 2016 and the back half of 2015.

Our claim data, the public chatter we hear from others in the marketplace, and other third-party data all cause us to continue to believe that our experience is principally environmental as opposed to specific to us or our Quantum Auto product. Loss trends change in our business, and as I've said before, our objective is to recognize it and react to the data we have as quickly as possible. We're taking actions to improve the personal auto profitability, and Brian will address this in more detail.

Before I pass the mic to Jay Benet, let me conclude with this: 2016 was another strong year adding to our long-term track record of delivering superior results. We enter 2017 with a great deal of momentum, and we're well positioned for continued success.

With that, I'll turn it over to Jay Benet.

Jay Benet
Thanks, Alan. As Alan mentioned, we're very pleased with our results this quarter, a record net and operating income per diluted share of $3.28 and $3.20 respectively, operating income of $919 million, up 4% from the prior year quarter, and operating ROE of 16.4%. These results were driven by the continued solid underwriting performance as evidenced by our consolidated combined ratio of 90%, which included the favorable impact of prior year reserve development, which I'll discuss shortly, as well as the unfavorable impacts of CAT losses of $137 million pre-tax that related to Hurricane Matthew and the fires in Tennessee, and higher than expected auto BI losses in Personal Insurance.

The quarter also benefitted from the settlement of a reinsurance dispute and higher after-tax net investment income which, after increasing sequentially quarter-by-quarter this year, increased 12% this quarter over the prior year quarter all due to higher non-fixed income returns. Fixed income NII of $405 million after-tax, down $17 million from the prior year quarter due to the continuing impact of the low interest rate environment.

Looking forward into 2017, and based on the current interest rate environment, and the specific securities that are scheduled to mature in 2017, we expect approximately $15 million to $20 million of lower after-tax NII on a quarterly basis in 2017 when compared to the corresponding periods of 2016. This is a $5 million per quarter improvement from what we communicated last quarter due to the recent rise in interest rates. Of course, if interest rates were to continue to rise from their current levels, this expected decrease in fixed income NII would be reduced even further. In contrast to the decrease in fixed income NII, non-fixed income NII of $96 million after tax was up $71 million from the prior year quarter driven by significantly higher private equity returns.

We continued to experience net favorable prior year reserve development on a consolidated basis which totaled $264 million pre-tax this quarter, down a bit form the $292 million pre-tax in the prior year quarter. In Business and International, net favorable development of $234 million pre-tax was driven by better than expected loss experience in workers' comp and general liability, while in Bond and Specialty, net favorable development of $75 million pre-tax resulted from better than expected loss experience in fidelity and surety and general liability.

Reserve development was unfavorable this quarter in Personal Insurance, $45 million pre-tax, driven by higher than expected auto BI injury losses related to the latter part of the 2015 accident year. This corresponds with the increase in auto BI loss estimates that we made for the current accident year which Brian will be discussing. In total, for the full year, we had consolidated net favorable reserve development of $771 million pre-tax, with approximately $665 million coming from our US operations and $106 million coming from International.

As I've done in the past, I'm also providing you with some insight into what our combined 2016 Schedule P is expected to show when we file it on May 1. On a combined stat basis for all of our US subs, all accident years across all product lines in the aggregate will have developed favorably. On a Schedule P product line basis, all of our commercial products will show favorable development or very modest amounts of unfavorable development. For Personal Insurance, homeowners will show a modest amount of unfavorable development, primarily resulting from the higher than expected loss experience that I discussed in the third quarter webcast that related to a small number of liability claims from accident years 2013 and 2014, and private passenger auto liability will show the unfavorable development that I just referred to.

There are two topics I'd like to cover relating to reinsurance. First, we were very pleased this quarter to have settled with one of our reinsurers in the USF&G versus Am Re et al case, a reinsurance dispute that's been pending for many years. As a result of the settlement, we recognized a $126 million pre-tax or $82 million after-tax gain in our fourth quarter earnings. I refer you to the Form 8-K that we filed on November 8th for more information related to this settlement.

Second, as shown on page 21 of the webcast, effective January 1, we renewed our corporate CAT aggregate XOL treaty that provides coverage for both single CAT events and an accumulation of losses from multiple CAT events, with similar terms as in the prior year and at a slightly lower cost. The treaty continues to provide $1.5 billion of coverage, part of $2 billion excess of $3 billion, after a $100 million deductible per occurrence. It keeps the same broad peril and geographic coverage and the same positioning of the coverage layer, providing a significant buffer between earnings and capital. The treaty has a single limit with no reinstatement provisions. Please note that the total cost of this treaty and therefore the reduction in cost are quite small in relation to our operating income**.**

Operating cash flows were very strong this quarter, $1.14 billion, including the proceeds from the settlement of the reinsurance dispute I just mentioned, and after making a $200 million discretionary contribution to our now fully funded US qualified pension plan, bringing total operating cash flows for the year to over $4.2 billion. We continue to generate much more capital than is needed to support our businesses and, consistent with our ongoing capital management strategy, we returned $942 million of excess capital to our shareholders this quarter through dividends of $191 million and common share repurchases of $751 million. For the full year, we returned over $3.2 billion of excess capital to shareholders through dividends of $762 million and common share repurchases of over $2.4 billion.

Holding company liquidity ended the year at $1.68 billion, well above our target level, and our debt to total capital ratio, excluding the impact of net unrealized investment gains, ended the year at 22.3%, well within its target range. Net unrealized investment gains were $1.1 billion pre-tax, or $0.7 billion after tax, down from almost $2 billion and $1.3 billion, respectively, at the beginning of the year, due to the recent run-up in interest rates and spreads.

As you may recall, we generally use a buy and hold approach for fixed income investing, so any change in unrealized that relates to a change in the general level of interest rates is something we do not pay much attention to. Cash flows from the portfolio are what matter to us. Book value per share of $83.05 grew 4% from the beginning of the year and, importantly, adjusted book value per share of $80.44, which eliminates the after-tax impact of net unrealized investment gains, grew by 7% this year.

With that, let me give the microphone over to Brian.

Brian MacLean
Thanks Jay. I'll start with Business and International Insurance, where we are pleased with our full-year financial and production results. We continued to generate excellent returns, achieving a combined ratio of 94.3%. Retention for our domestic businesses remained at historically high levels, and we successfully achieved positive rate change with renewal premium increases of over 2%. As Alan mentioned, retention for the industry remains very strong, reflecting a stable marketplace, and in that light we were quite pleased that we were able to generate nearly $2 billion of new business premiums, up slightly from 2015.

Looking at the quarter's financial results, operating income of $722 million was higher than the prior year quarter by $156 million, with a very strong combined ratio of 89%. Operating income included the $82 million after-tax gain related to the settlement of a reinsurance dispute that Jay mentioned earlier. This gain was in other income, and accordingly, did not benefit the combined ratio. The underlying combined ratio, which excludes the impact of CATs and prior year reserve development, was 93.1%. The underlying loss ratio was 1.4 points lower than the prior year, due to lower large losses and non-catastrophe weather-related losses, partially offset by a modest amount of margin compression.

Turning to production, given the returns that we are generating in the segment, our focus continues to be on retention, and we are very pleased that retention for our Domestic business remained at 85% for the quarter. Renewal premium change of 2.5 points included renewal rate change of 0.7% of a point, which was higher than recent quarters, while new business came in at $439 million for the quarter.

Turning to the individual businesses, in Select, retention continued its improving trend, and came in at a strong 83%. Renewal premium change was nearly six points, and we generated new business premiums of $92 million, up 7% versus the prior year.

In Middle Market, retention of 87% remained at a historically high level, while renewal premium change was over 2 points, including 1.4 points of renewal rate change, a full point higher than the third quarter. New business activity as measured in submissions and quotes, has been up for the year, and in the quarter remained consistent with the prior year. However, as 2016 progressed, fewer of these opportunities met our underwriting standards and/or return objectives, and accordingly new business premiums of $226 million in the quarter were down 9% year-over-year.

In Other Business Insurance, renewal premium change was down slightly with a relatively flat rate environment compared to the third quarter of 2016, while retention remained strong at 80% with and new business premiums of $121 million. New business volumes for Other Business Insurance were impacted by the same market dynamics I discussed in Middle Market.

In International, production results were very strong in the quarter. Retention remained at 82%, while renewal premium change of over two points was higher than recent quarters, with the biggest single driver of the increase being Lloyds, which due to the transactional nature of that market is subject to variability. New business volume of $91 million was up 14% year-over-year, driven by Lloyds, including the results of our new global construction and renewable energy groups.

So all-in for the segment, it was a very good quarter capping off a year with strong production and profitability.

Before turning to Bond and Specialty, I want to comment on our outlook for operating margins, which we include in our quarterly filings. Since our 10-K won't be filed for a few weeks I would note that we expect underlying underwriting margins and the underlying combined ratio during 2017 will be broadly consistent with those in 2016. This is subject to the usual caveats and forward-looking statement disclaimers.

I'll now turn to Bond and Specialty Insurance, which continues to perform exceptionally well. Operating income for the quarter of $161 million remained strong and was in line with the prior year quarter, as an improved underlying underwriting margin was offset by a slightly lower level of net favorable prior year reserve development. The underlying combined ratio was 79.7% for both the quarter and year, with the full-year result being an all-time best for the segment.

On top line, net written premiums for the quarter were consistent with the prior year for both Surety and Management Liability. In our Management Liability business, we continued to execute our strategy of retaining our best performing accounts while writing new business in return adequate product segments, and so we couldn't be more pleased that retention for the quarter was a record 88%, while we added $41 million of new business.

Renewal premium change of 2.3 points is down about a point from recent quarters, reflecting a mix change impacting average policy duration. The other components of renewal premium change that drive profitability were essentially unchanged. So Bond and Specialty results remain terrific and we continue to feel great about the segment's performance and execution in the market.

In terms of outlook, as with Business Insurance, for 2017 we expect both the underlying underwriting margin and underlying combined ratio will be broadly consistent with 2016.

Turning to Personal Insurance, net written premiums for the segment grew 12% in the quarter with a combined ratio of 98.2%, and an underlying combined ratio of 93.2%. For the full-year, net written premiums grew 10% with a combined ratio of 95.1% and an underlying combined ratio of 90.1%. So overall, strong results for the segment, but results by line were mixed.

In auto, as Alan mentioned, we booked further upward revisions in our loss estimates for 2016 and for the second half of 2015. The auto combined ratio for the quarter was 116.7% and includes both the full-year impact of the bodily injury-related adjustments that I just mentioned, and seasonably higher fourth quarter loss levels. So instead of taking you through a detailed reconciliation of the quarter, it would be more productive to focus on the full-year ratios. For the full-year combined ratio was 104.0%, and the underlying combined ratio was 101.8%. These were both higher than we expected and at a level that does not meet our target returns.

The full-year 2016 underlying combined ratio included about two points from the tenure effect that we discussed last quarter. As we said then, when you're growing your book of business, the higher levels of new business will temporarily increase the combined ratio and the impact of tenure in the year was as we expected.

In addition to the impact of tenure, the full-year 2016 underlying combined ratio is elevated by 3.5 points due to the recognition of the increased auto bodily injury liability losses. This result represents a gap that we are working to close. You will recall that we reacted to signs of adverse bodily injury loss development with a reserve adjustment in the third quarter. Unfortunately, since then we saw further development in excess of even those increased expectations, which drove our actions this quarter.

The deterioration is primarily driven by an increase in the trend toward more severe accidents. Some of the factors that lead us to this observation are a higher percentage of claims involving distracted driving, more accidents involving higher speeds, and more accidents on highways and at intersections. This is also consistent with recent industry data, for example, the National Safety Council report of significantly higher traffic fatalities in 2015 and 2016, a two-year trend that we haven't seen in decades.

In response to these developments, we are taking action in the marketplace. Our primary response is to file for increased base rate, and in November and December of 2016, rate increases were implemented in 16 states which cover about 60% of our quote volume. More rate changes at higher aggregate levels are planned for 2017, along with other ongoing actions to refine and optimize our underwriting processes. The combined impact of these actions should be to both reduce the rate of growth and improve profitability. While it will take 18 to 24 months for the actions we're implementing to fully earn into the portfolio, we do expect that the auto combined ratio will improve in 2017.

Turning to homeowners and other, our results for the quarter and the full year remain strong, and reinforce the value of a portfolio underwriter. The underlying combined ratio of 70.4% for the quarter and 75.7% for the year demonstrate consistent performance relative to 2015. In terms of top line, 2016 saw growth in net written premiums of 2% and we look to continue the momentum in 2017.

So as I said, mixed results by line in the segment, with challenges in auto mitigated by strong results in home, resulting in a segment combined ratio of 95.1% for the full year. We are fully aware that our recent auto results need to improve. The pricing and underwriting actions we're implementing should put us on track to deliver a more profitable portfolio in the years ahead.

Finally, as it relates to our outlook for Personal Insurance, we expect underlying underwriting margins during 2017 will be slightly higher than in 2016 and the underlying combined ratio during 2017 will be broadly consistent with 2016. In Agency Automobile, we expect underlying underwriting margins and the underlying combined ratio will improve in 2017 compared to 2016. In Agency Homeowners and other, we expect that underlying underwriting margins will be slightly lower and the underlying combined ratio will be slightly higher in 2017 than in 2016, reflecting higher, and more normalized, levels of loss activity.

With that, let me turn it over to Gabi.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Gabriella Nawi
Thank you. We're now ready to start the Q&A portion. Before we start, if I could just ask you to limit yourself to one question and one follow-up. Thank you.

Operator
Thank you. Ladies and gentlemen, if you'd like to register a question, please press the one followed by the four on your telephone. You will hear a three tone prompt to acknowledge your request. If your question has been answered, and you would like to withdraw your registration, please press the one followed by the three. If you are using a speakerphone, please lift your handset before entering your request. One moment please for the first question.

And our first question comes from the line of Michael Nannizzi with Goldman Sachs. Please proceed with your question.

Michael Nannizzi
Thanks so much. Maybe a little bit on auto, if you could just give some indication of how we should be thinking about the starting point for '17, and given the adjustments you made through the year, when should we start to see the rate increases flow through, and should we expect the starting point to be closer to the developed loss ratio picks that you have set now for '16?

Michael Klein
Michael, this is Michael Klein from Personal Insurance. I'll take a crack at that. I think you will see the rate increases start to flow through in the first quarter. As Brian said, we began making rate filings in the fourth quarter, really in response to what we saw in the third quarter. The rate filings that we're now making as we look ahead to the first half of the year reflect the increased loss content that we saw in the fourth quarter.

Importantly, you don't see a lot of the fourth quarter rate filing activity in the production statistics just because of the timing of those rate increases. They went in in November and December, largely not impacting renewals until December. So, it's really a timing issue in terms of not seeing it show up in the fourth quarter of this year, but we would expect that you'll see the rate momentum start to build in the first quarter of 2017 and continue from there.

In terms of the starting point for 2017, I would say two things. First of all, as Brian mentioned, that 3.5 points that you see on the webcast slide, he mentioned that represents a gap that we're looking to close. In other words, that 3.5 points is built into our baseline expectation as we start 2017. Then, we're taking trend and forecasting that forward from that point. So, the starting point does include that 3.5 points of additional losses and the gap that we're looking to close.

Brian MacLean
Michael, this is Brian. I would also just emphasize obviously thinking through the written versus earned dynamic with the rate. As we obviously get it on a written basis, it has to earn in over time. Hence, my comment of 18 to 24 months to work through the 3.5 points.

Michael Nannizzi
Got it, got it. Okay, that's helpful, thanks. And then, most of your policies are 50/50 annual versus six months policies. Is that right or somewhere in that range?

Michael Klein
It's a little bit more tilted toward the annual. So, it's about 60/40 annual versus six months.

Michael Nannizzi
Okay, got it, and then, Brian, when you mentioned the margin outlook for '17 versus '16, does that contemplate that whatever trend you're seeing is the nadir and that we're not going to see more deterioration, or does that contemplate that you're going to see the loss trend continue to increase at

maybe some pace not at the same level as we've seen, or if you'd give some context there. Thanks.

Brian MacLean

I think, as Michael just said, the 3.5 elevation is built into our expectation. Above that, we're expecting normal 3.5% loss trend which includes a more normal inflation of severity, but we don't expect another spike. Michael?

Michael Klein

Yes, I would say just to clarify, Brian mentioned the 3.5 loss trend. That is an elevated loss trend relative to where we've been. So, the forecast importantly, I think, it's important to take away that it includes both the increased baseline and a higher trend estimate going forward than we had in the past, just modestly higher, but it is a bit of an increase in trend.

Michael Nannizzi

Got it, great. Thank you very much.

Gabriella Nawi

Next question, please.

Operator

Our next question comes from the line of Kai Pan with Morgan Stanley. Please proceed with your question.

Kai Pan

Thank you. Good morning. First question is just on the deterioration of fourth quarter. What exactly, if you're looking back on third quarter, what exactly accelerated in terms of loss cost trend from the third quarter? And just want to get the confidence level that what you book in the fourth quarter, you think that's it, and it's probably not be much material like a deterioration from that level.

Brian MacLean

Yes, so the first thing I'd say, Kai, it's all the normal stuff. Now, we're talking about very recent accident periods for a very long tail line of business. Just as a perspective, at the end of 2016, we have paid less than 15% of what we believe the ultimate losses will be for auto bodily injury. So it's by nature a long tail line of business, so it takes a while to play out.

We're looking at all of the activity that we see both in frequency and severity of loss cut every which way you can think of and looking at frequency activity, incurred losses, paid losses. Importantly, we're also, as we went into 2016, we're looking at that coming off of 2013-'14 and early 2015 where we actually had slightly favorable development in the '13 and '14 years and consistent experience in the early part of the '15 year. So, we're looking at the history that we have coming into the year.

As we went into '16, we started to see a little bit of movement in the fourth quarter '15 and early '16, but still within our range of expectations. We got to the third quarter, and those periods, again fourth quarter '15, first two quarters of '16 started to elevate above the expectations. Hence, we took the activity, and the actions that we did last quarter.

This quarter, as we look at all of those periods again, now we're looking at the end of '15, early first three quarters of '16, and obviously now another quarter of data, we saw a continuation in that trend that was accelerating. We took what we think was the appropriate management's best estimate given all of those factors. We feel good about it but there's certainly no guarantees that we can see what's going to happen next quarter.

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Michael, if you want to—

Michael Klein
Yes, I think that's exactly right. I think it's a combination of additional development on the periods that we saw before and an additional quarter's worth of data that again reflects the fact that that adverse development continued through the end of the year. And we've made our best estimate based on the information Brian just described.

Kai Pan
Okay, thanks, very comprehensive. My follow-up on the auto side, again, is that if you look at PIF growth 13% year-over-year, it's actually accelerated from the last few quarters. As you increase price, do you think that one's coming down and do you think that two points on the new business penalty impact will be smaller in 2017?

Michael Klein
Thanks, Kai. This is Michael. I would say a couple of things. Let me give you a little bit of the moving parts underneath the PIF growth in the fourth quarter. We do expect as we put rate into the marketplace and put additional rate into the marketplace that our win rates will decline. So, on the business that we quote do we convert it?

We've actually seen in the 16 states that Brian mentioned our win rates have come down as we put that rate into the marketplace. So, think of that as our batting average. Our batting average is dropping as we put rate into the marketplace. The reason PIF growth is up in the fourth quarter is actually largely driven by the fact that we ended up with more at bats than we expected in the quarter. So, quote growth is actually elevated so we have more plate appearances, if you will, but the batting average, the win rate, has actually come down in response to the rate.

Again, we think some of that is timing. Some of that, as we mentioned last quarter, the ultimate impact of the actions we take depends somewhat on the fact that we're in a competitive environment and the impact on growth depends a little bit on what happens in the marketplace. And so, our perception of what happened in the fourth quarter is we took rate, so did the market, the rate impacted our batting average, but the rate also drove business into the market, which drove that quote growth. So, the PIF growth is really a quote-growth story, not a conversion-rate story.

In terms of your question about expectation as we look ahead, our actions are focused on two things: improving profitability and managing growth. So I gave you a little bit of an outlook for 2017 rate looking ahead into the first quarter. We would expect rate will rise and growth will drop as we look into the first quarter. What ultimately happens will depend on how those actions play out in the marketplace.

Kai Pan
Thank you so much.

Gabriella Nawi
Next question, please.

Operator
Our next question comes from the line of Paul Newsome with Sandler O'Neill. Please proceed with your question.

Paul Newsome
I wanted to switch the question on to the Commercial business a little bit. I was wondering if you could give just a little bit more color on the pricing environment in the Domestic insurance business. It's a little bit tough to read the tea leaves but is it better, is it worse? Is there really any change from a competitive perspective in that business?

Brian MacLean
So, Paul, this is Brian. I'll start; I'm sure there'll be follow-ups to this. But, broadly speaking, we feel good about the trends that we see. When you look across the data on the renewal book, we continue to see some, albeit modest, but pretty consistent improvement in what we're seeing. And we're encouraged by that; we think that might be somewhat a reflection of the market. But fundamentally, I think it's a reflection of our execution.

Our strategy on our portfolio remains incredibly consistent and that is to look at it on a very granular account by account, or class by class basis, and simplistically, for the really well-performing businesses, keep it at the best price that we can keep it at and the appropriate price and then work hard at improving the rest of the portfolio. When we look at that granular level, we feel really good about the momentum and also feel good about the aggregate statistics.

So, directionally we feel positive.

Alan Schnitzer
Paul, it's Alan. I would add to that it's not just a market dynamic, it's in our execution dynamic. It's very granular, as Brian said, account by account, class by class. And I think in some respects, and importantly, it's the franchise value we bring to the marketplace. So, we look at an account and we figure out what we need to do to achieve the written return objectives that we have, and I would say broadly speaking, we've been successful.

Paul Newsome
How closely does the Commercial auto business or has the Commercial auto business tracked the results of the private passenger auto?

Alan Schnitzer
Paul, I'd say that we see a lot of the same trends in the businesses. They're different businesses. They have different starting points. The coverages aren't exactly the same. For example, on the Personal Line side, you have uninsured and underinsured motorists, that's not such a factor on the Commercial side. I would say broadly speaking, the trends are consistent. We see consistency across them but the results don't actually come out the same for a whole host of reasons.

Paul Newsome
So, we haven't seen the severity issue even at a lower level in Commercial auto?

Alan Schnitzer
No, I wouldn't say we haven't seen it. We have seen it; it has impacted recent years. We see a lot of the same trends. But, on the auto side it's largely private passenger; on the Commercial side, you have a lot of trucking so you have different dynamics there. Also, it just manifests itself differently. On the Personal Line side, auto is obviously a bigger contributor to the segment, more in terms of volume. So, it just manifests itself more prominently. On the BI side, obviously Commercial auto is a smaller piece of the whole so it manifests itself differently.

So, we do see very consistent trends across both books.

Paul Newsome
Great. Thank you very much.

Alan Schnitzer
Thank you.

Gabriella Nawi
Next question, please.

Operator
Our next question comes from the line of Larry Greenberg with Janney Montgomery Scott. Please proceed with your question.

Larry Greenberg
Thank you. So, I want to go back to the auto. And, I appreciate that you think it's mostly environmental on top of the tenure issue. But I guess I just want to challenge you a bit on this and just question whether you think it's fair to say that maybe you picked up on some of these environmental factors later than some of the others did. And, if you agree with that, why do you think that's the case?

And, I kind of say this in the context of when you were growing rapidly in auto, and before you picked up on the BI trends, I know you talked about being keenly focused on what was driving that growth. So, I'm just curious on your thoughts on all that.

Brian MacLean
Larry, this is Brian. And, I'll start with there's a lot in your question. We do believe it's a fundamentally environmental issue. We would never say it is definitively, exclusively an environmental issue. As I think I said last quarter, as I'm sure I said last quarter, Quantum 2.0 is a relatively new product that we're working out. And accordingly, we are very attuned to looking at how it is performing and always looking to improve it.

I would not agree with your statement that we are late to seeing the fundamental trend of what's going on in bodily injury severity. And without doing a long history, you can go back 2011, 2012, 2013, we were talking about this a lot. Distracted driving and speeds are not brand-new things. We were talking about it then. We got to '13 and talked about an elevated level of bodily injury and we were hoping that that would remain pretty constant.

And, we went through about a two-year period, 2013, 2014, into 2015, where we saw very constant, again elevated levels, but consistent with our expectations of what we were getting in bodily injury. In fact, 2014 has developed favorably and we continue to see that. And what we are talking about now is another increase in that trend. And we're talking about very, very recent accident periods and looking at the data and responding, I think, pretty quickly.

And so, I think there's a bunch of things. Further, on the comment of you're sure it's not Quantum 2.0, we're sure it's not exclusively Quantum 2.0 because when we look across our business the same fundamental trends are in the legacy book of business, are in the Quantum 1.0 book of business, are in the Quantum 2.0 book of business, are in the Business Insurance business. It's in industry data; it's with other carriers. So, it's not exclusively a Quantum issue.

With that said, we are very granularly looking at how that product is performing state by state, cell by cell, and reacting. So, I know that's probably sounding way more defensive than I should, but it—

Alan Schnitzer
The one thing I would add to that—Larry, it's Alan—the profile of the business that we're attracting, we actually like it. So, we look at the profile of all the business coming in and if we didn't like that profile we would have a different answer for you. But, fundamentally we like it; we just like it at a higher base rate.

Larry Greenberg
Great, thanks.

Gabriella Nawi
I guess that was your question. Next question, please.

Operator
Our next question comes from the line of Meyer Shields with Keefe, Bruyette & Woods. Please proceed with your question.

Meyer Shields
Thanks. One, I guess, a question on the actual quarter. There was a slowdown in exposure unit growth within the Middle Market and I was hoping you could talk to that a little bit.

Alan Schnitzer
Meyer, there's nothing fundamental in terms of trends changing there. There's always going to be some normal volatility from quarter to quarter and things that drive the exposure, but there's really nothing fundamental that we would identify as a trend.

Meyer Shields
Okay, so not related to the improving renewal rate changes.

Alan Schnitzer
No.

Meyer Shields
Okay. And then more broadly speaking, when you look at the targeted after-tax returns, would a change in tax rate change what you're targeting?

Alan Schnitzer
Yes, that's an interesting question. I guess, instead of answering that specific question, let me just back up because my guess is there's a lot of questions on the call in terms of change in administration, macro environment, how it's going to change a lot of different things. So, maybe I'll just back up.

We are very return focused in the way we think about this business. It is the lens through which we evaluate just about every decision that we make. And so, we calibrate our return expectation to our cost of capital. And so, there are a couple of things going on that could impact our cost of capital. For example, if the risk free rate goes up, cost of equity goes up. If the tax rate goes down, then our after-tax cost of borrowing, theoretically goes up. There could be other things in a change in tax policy. But, if you just started with those two simple assumptions, you'd look at that and say, if the risk free rate goes up and if the tax rate goes down, you'd speculate that our overall cost of capital would go up. If our overall cost of capital went up, then our return objectives would go up with it.

Meyer Shields
Okay, that's very helpful. Thank you.

Gabriella Nawi
Next question.

Operator
Our next question comes from the line of Brian Meredith with UBS. Please proceed with your question.

Brian Meredith
Yes, thanks, a couple questions here. Just first, on the Personal Line, do you think that the rate actions you're taking on auto insurance will have an impact on homeowners' growth here going forward?

Michael Klein
I think that's possible. We've certainly talked about the fact that our auto growth has—one of the benefits of our auto growth has been growth in home. That said, we're doing what we can to mitigate that impact. And we have specific actions we're taking from an agency management and a distribution standpoint and in other areas to try to make sure that any impact from the rate actions in auto don't have an impact on our ability to grow home. We're trying to continue the momentum that we have in the home line in 2017.

Alan Schnitzer
In other words, they definitely correlate, but we're hopeful there are things we can do to offset that and try to lever up the home growth.

Brian Meredith
Got you. And then the second question, on the Domestic business insurance, we've seen your rate activity modestly increase the last several quarters. Is that a trend which should continue and are you getting to a point now where you're saying alright, can't let the underlying loss ratio deteriorate anymore on an underwriting year basis?

Alan Schnitzer
I know this won't be totally satisfying but I think we're going to go back to the answer we give which is we look at the accounts that are up for renewal every quarter and we try to figure out what we need to do to achieve our written return objectives. And it's every single one of those transactions, or every portfolio on the flow stuff, really evaluated one at a time that rises up to that number. So, we don't paint with a broad brush. We don't go out to the market and say, get 1.4 points of rate in Middle Market. We say this is our overall return objective and go out and execute one account or class at a time to get there.

We will when we get to the 10-K give you an outlook on RPC. So, we haven't shared that yet. It'll be in the 10-K when it comes out but we never forecast on uniquely on pure rate.

Brian Meredith
Right, but you are forecasting for a flat, underlying combined ratio, right, for the next year? If I remember correctly that was part of it. Yes, there's going to be better non-CAT weather, at least normalization, and then deterioration from rate below trend. Right?

Alan Schnitzer
Yes. So the margin compression that we've had this quarter and the last few quarters has been relatively modest and this quarter and in past quarters it's been within other things that caused volatility in the period-over-period comparison, most notably this quarter and probably recent quarters, weather and large losses. So, when we give you that outlook, and yes we did say broadly consistent, we're certainly not measuring it to the basis point, but broadly consistent within a relatively narrow range, that

takes into account lots of things: rate, loss trend, mix, claims handling initiatives, other strategic objectives. So, it really is an all-in assessment and we try not to focus too narrowly on that narrow rate loss trend. You have exposure in there, too, contributing to margin.

So, it really is a broader perspective when it comes to our outlook on margin.

Brian Meredith
Great, thanks, Alan.

Alan Schnitzer
Thank you.

Gabriella Nawi
Next question, please.

Operator
Our next question comes from the line of Jay Cohen with Bank of America Merrill Lynch. Please proceed with your question.

Jay Cohen
Yes, one more question, I guess, about the new administration. Obviously something that's been talked about relative to taxes is a border adjustment tax. And I'm wondering if you could share your thoughts on how that may affect your purchase of reinsurance from non-US companies.

Alan Schnitzer
Jay, good morning, it's Alan. Let me start. It's really hard to answer that question without knowing what the border adjustment is going to look like. We've all read it depends on whether it gets characterized as an export or an import and whether the dialogue defaults to the Neal Bill and we'll see where that comes out.

I think broadly speaking as it relates to us and reinsurance, I think our answer would be we're by and large a gross line underwriter. We like our underwriting; we'd like to keep it. And we buy reinsurance in pretty modest amounts. And so, if there were a tax adjustment that changed the cost of reinsurance, obviously we could look for alternative providers of reinsurance. We could buy a little bit less, buy a little bit more. But, it would come down to evaluating the individual transaction.

But, I think the broader point for us is reinsurance just isn't that big of a deal for us.

Jay Cohen
Got it. Thanks for the thoughts.

Alan Schnitzer
Thank you.

Gabriella Nawi
Next question, please.

Operator
Our next question comes from the line of Amit Kumar with Macquarie. Please proceed with your question.

Amit Kumar
Thanks, and good morning, two quick follow-ups on personal auto. The first question I have is if I go back and look at the rates that were put in place for 2016, I guess average rate filings were in the range of, let's say, 3% or so. So, when you talk about the rate filings in November, December, and going forward, how should we think about that number compared to the historical 3% average number?

Alan Schnitzer
Good morning, Amit, it's Alan. I would say it's a pretty broad range. It depends on the state. And even there, it depends on two things: one, our experience in that state and the rate need, but also recent rate filings in that state, right, because there's a cumulative nature to it. But, certainly, it's getting bigger than what you'd seen earlier in 2016 and we expect more of the same during 2017 to try to close that gap of the 3.5 points.

Amit Kumar
Okay, so probably more than that. Is that a fair way to look at it?

Alan Schnitzer
Yes, definitely.

Amit Kumar
Okay. The second question, and the final question I have, is you talked about 60% of your book, 16 states, you said more filings were in the pipeline. Is that immediate? Is that like a Jan./Feb. thing or is that more spread out versus the actions taken in the past?

Michael Klein
Amit, this is Michael. I would say just to first clarify the comments. So, the comment was 60% of our quote volume. So, again, think of that as if that's a new business statistic. Right? So the 16 states that we filed in so far, those represent roughly 60% of our new business quote volume, not exactly the same as 60% of the book, just a point of clarification.

I would say the majority of the rest of the states have rate filings planned for the first quarter. And so, broadly speaking, we will have made rate filings in the majority of the states where we have the auto product by the end of the first quarter. We also have additional rate actions planned for later in the year. And that, obviously, is all subject to regulatory approval and regulatory constraints as to the timing and the amount. But, I would say the first round ought to be in market by late end of first quarter. And then we have follow-up actions on the drawing board as we look into the remainder of 2017.

Amit Kumar
Alright, that's very helpful. Thanks for the answers and good luck for the future.

Alan Schnitzer
Thank you.

Gabriella Nawi
Thank you, next question, please.

Operator
Our next question comes from the line of Ryan Tunis with Credit Suisse. Please proceed with your question.

Ryan Tunis

Hi, thanks. My first question, I guess, is for Brian, and it's on the new business penalty. It doesn't sound like the thinking has really changed on the impact of the new business penalty, I guess, even though the environment's revealed itself to be a bit more of an issue, maybe than we thought a couple quarters ago. Just, what gives you confidence, I guess, to continue to compartmentalize the BI severity versus the new business drag especially when you think about the fact that a pretty good size of the book is new business?

And, I guess, along those lines, if there still is a big tenure impact, why wouldn't we assume that a lot of that strain alleviates itself in 2017 with the growth pullback?

Brian MacLean
Yes, so a couple things. So, I think of the tenure impact as being discrete from the bodily injury trend. So the tenure impact is just the math of the maturing of the book of business; and in fact, where it goes in 2017 is a function somewhat of what growth rates do. It will likely increase in 2017 slightly as the growth that we've seen in the back half of 2016 earns through the business.

But I think of the tenure impact as more of just the arithmetic of—I don't think of it as a new business penalty as in a BI where you're pricing differently.

Michael Klein
Yes, and again—this is Michael—I would say just to reinforce what Brian said, when we talk about the tenure effect, what we're really trying to do is just isolate the impact on the loss ratio from the relative age of the business, if you will, how tenured it is, what renewal it is at. And as Brian said, it's essentially a mathematical exercise to estimate what that component is worth, and then the rest of it, the environmental trend that we talked about, the 3.5 points that's in the full-year loss ratio is absolutely the gap that we're actively working to close. What we do in the meantime is we monitor the performance of the tenuring and try to isolate that and make sure that that is developing as we expected. And that analysis has remained relatively consistent and is why we continue to have that same 2% estimate a quarter later.

Ryan Tunis
Okay, that's helpful. And then a couple quick ones for Jay Benet. First, on the workers' comp and then general liability, just curious, the accident years on those reserve releases, and also just any color on how new money yields have changed, I guess, today versus the end of the third quarter. Thanks.

Jay Benet
As it relates to the accident year question, it's really spread amongst a number of accident years. We, in the past, in our disclosures have said at times it's related to accident year X and Y. And when we were preparing the disclosures this time, the laundry list of accident years was exceptionally long and we just said, well why don't we just say what it relates to. So, there isn't any particular accident year for either one of them, it's just spread amongst various ones.

As it relates to the new money yields, just looking up some stats, let's see we generally tend to focus on the 10-year Treasury. So, if you look at where the 10-year Treasury was at the end of September, it was 1.6 and ended December at 2.45. Spreads moved in that timeframe, as well. So, I think you could look at the public data as to what took place, but a considerable rise in interest rates from one period to the next.

I don't know, Bill, do you want to add something to that?

William Heyman

I thought I might add a little. Obviously the question goes to at what point will new money yields exceed maturing yields. Obviously the action of the fourth quarter gets us closer to that point but we're not yet where we need to be. We've done a fair amount of work on it in the last few weeks. And, using a whole bunch of assumptions which would take a long time to relate, we think for taxables being replaced by taxables, we reach that point sometime in the first half of 2017. For municipals replacing municipals, closer to the first half of 2019.

Obviously a lot is going to be determined by the shape of any tax legislation. At the very extreme, if you needed a revenue neutral bill, and the municipal exemption itself were affected, that would be non-trivial. If corporate rates and individual rates were simply lowered and the relative value of municipals were affected, and they've already cheapened, that would be less important to us.

But the bottom line is what I think you're getting at we're not quite there yet.

Ryan Tunis
Okay, that's really helpful. Thanks, guys.

Jay Benet
This is Jay Benet again if I could just add one thing. Not relating to your questions, but during my remarks, one of my colleagues tapped me on the shoulder indicating that instead of referring back to November's filing of the Form 8-K, I inadvertently said 10-K. So, we don't file a 10-K in November, we did file an 8-K about the settlement. So, I just wanted to correct the record.

Gabriella Nawi
Okay, next question, please.

Operator
Our next question comes from the line of Elyse Greenspan with Wells Fargo. Please proceed with your question.

Elyse Greenspan
Hi, thank you. Good morning. One question first on the personal auto book, as you pointed to your margin outlook for 2017, can you talk about the components of the expense ratio and the underlying loss ratio? The expense ratio did tick down into Q4. So is part of helping to get to your margin goal for next year some kind of improvement in the expense ratio to offset potentially a continued deterioration on the loss side? Can you just take us through the components a little bit?

Alan Schnitzer
Elyse, good morning, it's Alan. I would say that we go about as far as we want to go in giving outlook and we're pretty hesitant to start breaking it down into the component pieces. Part of our strategy, at least on the auto side, was obviously reducing expenses and you've seen that come through to some extent already. But, going forward, we prefer not to break out the pieces.

Elyse Greenspan
Okay, thank you. And then one question, the business insurance reserve releases picked up materially year-over-year as well as sequentially. I know you referenced it spanned numerous accident years and workers' comp and GL lines. As we may think about potentially an environment where we'll see higher inflation levels going forward, I'm just wondering if you can provide some commentary surrounding the picks that you're using on some of your longer tail lines and what gave you confidence for such a high level reserve releases given the uncertainty surrounding forward inflation levels. Thank you.

Jay Benet
As it relates to reserving, as well as pricing and loss fix for a particular year, we're not assuming in any of the work we do this year or in any previous years that whatever the inflation environment that currently exists, and I'd have to say it's an inflation environment related to the specific drivers of losses in our product as opposed to the general level of inflation. But we never assume that things are going to stay stagnant. There's an underlying assumption that things will over time revert back to the mean.

As you can well imagine, there's a great deal of actuarial judgment, management judgment, as to what that means. So, and looking at the reserves as they exist today, looking at how the development patterns have manifested themselves in the loss triangles, we come up with what our best estimate is of the future payments that we will be making. And if those best estimates are lower than what the carried reserves are, we'll make adjustments for it. But it is factoring in a long-term view as to what levels of inflation might be.

Elyse Greenspan
Okay, thank you very much.

Gabriella Nawi
This will be our last question, please. Thank you.

Operator
And that's from the line of Jay Gelb with Barclays. Please proceed with your question.

Jay Gelb
Thank you. I had a question on your asbestos exposure. Earlier this month, The Hartford announced an economically favorable transaction with Berkshire Hathaway to buy retroactive reinsurance contract. The size of Hartford's exposure is very similar to Travelers at $1.8 billion for asbestos environmental. There's been a $300 million annual pre-tax drag on Travelers' earnings for the past two years. I'm wondering what your thoughts are now that other companies are taking steps to address these legacy exposures.

Alan Schnitzer
Thanks for asking, Jay. There's nothing fundamentally novel about those transactions. And as you can imagine, we look at them from time to time. So far we haven't seen terms on one of those deals that we found attractive enough to do. And I'm not sure what else to say about it.

Jay Gelb
Thanks very much.

Alan Schnitzer
Thank you.

CONCLUSION

Gabriella Nawi
Great. Thank you very much for joining us today. Have a great day.

Operator
Ladies and gentlemen that does conclude the conference call for today. We thank you for your participation and ask that you please disconnect your lines.

Forward-Looking Statements and Non-GAAP Financial Measures:
This transcript contains certain “forward-looking statements” within the meaning of the Private Securities Litigation Reform Act of 1995. All statements, other than statements of historical facts, may be forward-looking statements. Words such as “may,” “will,” “should,” “likely,” “anticipates,” “expects,” “intends,” “plans,” “projects,” “believes,” “estimates” and similar expressions are used to identify these forward-looking statements. Examples of our forward-looking statements include statements relating to our future financial condition and operating results, our share repurchase plans, potential margins, potential returns, the sufficiency of our reserves and our strategic initiatives.

We caution investors that such statements are subject to risks and uncertainties, many of which are difficult to predict and generally beyond the company’s control, that could cause actual results to differ materially from those expressed in, or implied by, such forward-looking statements.

Some of the factors that could cause actual results to differ include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Catastrophe losses;
- Changes to our claims and claim adjustment expense reserves, including as a result of, among other things, changes in the legal, regulatory and economic environments in which the Company operates;
- Financial market disruption, economic downturn or prolonged period of slow economic growth;
- The performance of our investment portfolio;
- Asbestos and environmental claims and related litigation;
- Competition, including the impact of competition on our business volume and profitability;
- Disruptions to our relationships with our independent agents and brokers;
- Mass tort claims;
- Emerging claim and coverage issues;
- The collectability and availability of reinsurance coverage;
- Credit risk we face in business and investment operations, including under reinsurance or structured settlements, as well as guarantees or indemnifications from third parties;
- A downgrade in our claims-paying or financial strength ratings;
- The inability of our insurance subsidiaries to pay dividends to our holding company in sufficient amounts;
- Risks associated with developing new products or expanding in targeted markets;
- Risks associated with our use of pricing and capital models;
- Limits to the effectiveness of our information technology systems;
- Difficulties with our technology, data and network security, including as a result of cyber attacks, outsourcing relationships, or cloud-based technology;
- Changes in tax laws that adversely impact our investment portfolio or operating results;
- Risks associated with our business outside of the United States, including foreign currency exchange fluctuations and restrictive regulations, as well as the expected withdrawal by the United Kingdom from the European Union;
- Loss of or restrictions placed on the use of underwriting criteria, such as credit scoring, or other data or methodologies, in the pricing and underwriting of insurance products;
- Risks associated with acquisitions and integration of acquired businesses;
- Limits to the effectiveness of our compliance controls;
- Our ability to hire and retain qualified employees;
- We may be unable to protect and enforce our own intellectual property or may be subject to claims for infringing the intellectual property of others;
- The federal, state and international regulatory environment;
- Changes to existing accounting standards; and
- Factors impacting the operation of our share repurchase plans

For a more detailed discussion of these factors, see the information under "Risk Factors" and “Management’s Discussion and Analysis of Financial Condition and Results of Operations” in our most recent Form 10-K, as updated by our periodic filings with the Securities and Exchange Commission (“SEC”), which are accessible on the SEC’s website (www.sec.gov). Our forward-looking statements speak only as of the date of this presentation or as of the date they are made, and we undertake no obligation to update those statements
In this transcript, we may refer to some non-GAAP financial measures. For a reconciliation of these measures to the most comparable GAAP measures and a glossary of financial measures, we refer you to the press release and financial supplement that we have made available in connection with this transcript as well as our most recent periodic filings with the SEC. See the “For Investors” section at Travelers.com.