

# Synonymous with Innovation

An Interview with John S. Koudounis, Chief Executive Officer, Calamos Investments

**EDITORS' NOTE** John Koudounis joined Calamos Investments in April 2016. Previously, he was President and Chief Executive Officer, Mizuho Securities USA Inc.; Managing Director, ABN AMRO Inc; and Vice President, Merrill Lynch. He graduated from Brown University with a degree in international diplomacy, foreign affairs, and economics.



John S. Koudounis

**FIRM BRIEF** Calamos Investments ([calamos.com](http://calamos.com)) is a diversified global investment firm offering innovative investment strategies including alternatives, multi-asset, convertible, fixed income, and equity. The firm offers strategies through separately managed portfolios, mutual funds, closed-end funds, private funds, and UCITS funds. Clients include major corporations, pension funds, endowments, foundations, and individuals, as well as the financial advisors and consultants who serve them. Headquartered in the Chicago metropolitan area, the firm also has offices in London, New York, San Francisco, and Miami.

## Will you describe Calamos Investments' heritage and what have been the keys to Calamos' industry leadership?

Calamos Investments has been at the forefront of alternative investing and wealth management for more than four decades. Our rich heritage of innovation, investment expertise, and unwavering commitment to delivering service and performance excellence to our clients has solidified our position as a premier global investment management firm.

Calamos was born from the visionary and investment expert mind of our founder, John P. Calamos, Sr. His pioneering spirit led to the development of Calamos Wealth Management – dedicated to serving the complex and sophisticated wealth management needs of our high-net-worth clients – and the creation of innovative strategies such as convertible securities and liquid alternative investments delivered by our asset management business.

We remain focused on innovation – it's in our DNA. We're continuously optimizing our product offerings with new and high-demand investment strategies, such as private credit and ESG, and elevating our wealth planning capabilities to meet the needs of our wealth management clients.

## How do you define Calamos' culture and how critical has it been to maintain a strong culture as the firm has grown in size and scale?

Our culture plays a significant role in shaping the overall success, performance, and sustainability of Calamos. Since assuming the role of President & CEO in 2016, I've remained steadfast in executing our firm's long-term strategic vision, successfully doubling assets under management from roughly \$18 billion to almost \$40 billion to date.

Calamos is a private, family-owned firm which I believe contributes valuable benefits to culture, including our ability to innovate with speed, retain talent, foster loyalty, and maintain a collective, long-term perspective. Calamos has an extremely tenured 350-person associate base with an average of eight years with the firm. It's not uncommon, however, to find tenures of 20 or 25 years, a testament to our culture and the prioritization of our associates.

While Calamos has grown in size and stature, we've never lost appreciation for our associates and their deep loyalty and dedication to the success of our businesses.

## Will you provide an overview of Calamos' innovative products and services?

Calamos offers a broad and diverse range of investment products and wealth management services to individuals, financial advisors, and institutional investors. Our dedication to innovation and unwavering commitment to service and performance excellence has enabled us to execute our strategic growth plans during these complex and ever-evolving investment markets.

Remaining true to our heritage, we recently introduced new products that are reshaping the investment landscape today – a new ESG exchange-traded fund (ETF) delivered by an innovative partnership with world-renowned professional athlete and philanthropist, Giannis Antetokounmpo, and a private credit closed-end interval fund delivered through a partnership with Aksia, a premier global private credit manager.

The Calamos Antetokounmpo Global Sustainable Equities ETF marks the first time an asset manager and professional athlete

teamed together as 50/50 co-owners of a joint venture to deliver a sustainable investment fund. This isn't a sponsorship or endorsement relationship; Giannis is a co-owner and we've committed to delivering positive societal returns by donating up to 10 percent of our joint venture profits annually to charities that support themes of financial literacy and empowerment. The ticker "SROI" is an acronym for societal return on investment. The Fund is managed by our seasoned sustainable equities team who have spent the greater part of 30 years applying their proprietary ESG screening and analyses to uncover high growth opportunities for investment.

Calamos has been leading the way in alternative investments for more than 45+ years, so developing a private credit offering was a natural next step for the firm. Registered private credit offerings have recently gained traction in the market, but many private credit registered funds focus narrowly on U.S. direct lending. With the Calamos Aksia Alternative Credit & Income Fund (Ticker "CAPIX"), it will leverage Aksia's expertise and network of private credit sourcing partners to uncover what we believe are high quality deal opportunities and invest across the broad spectrum of private credit assets.

## How challenging is it to differentiate in the industry and how do you describe the Calamos difference?

Calamos' firm values and relentless focus on innovation has allowed the firm to remain differentiated in the market. We're not interested in being a firm that offers every investment type or strategy at low cost. We're a premium brand and specialize in delivering sophisticated liquid alternatives investments, convertible securities, and personalized wealth management capabilities that our clients need and are searching for.

This premium approach shapes all facets of Calamos, including our product development roadmaps, our sales consultant processes, our wealth planning capabilities, and how we market and engage with clients. The Calamos brand is synonymous with innovation and that is what has differentiated us from the competition for the last 45+ years.

## How important is it for Calamos to build a diverse and inclusive workforce?

Diverse and inclusive workplaces foster a culture of respect, collaboration, and innovation.

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Varying perspectives often result in creative and innovative solutions that can advance firm growth and organizations that prioritize D&I are often viewed positively by their clients and employees. Calamos is highly focused on increasing its diversity and inclusion profile and has established hiring and professional development processes through our human resources department that support and prioritize this critical theme and nurtures D&I practices to become habits.

**Will you discuss Calamos’ commitment to ESG and the firm’s capabilities in the context of responsible investing?**

When “ESG” is mentioned in an investing context, the general public – and a large portion of the finance industry – view it as something novel and somewhat uncharted. This is the case even though sustainable or socially responsible investing has existed since the 1960s. Still, ESG investing is often seen as difficult to navigate, due to increased regulation and politicization in recent years.

The reality is that this type of investing cannot be ignored. According to Bloomberg, ESG assets may surpass \$50 trillion by 2025. Furthermore, it is expected that \$1.3 trillion will enter ESG ETFs by that same year. Through certain company investments, investors are not only supporting environmental issues and a more socially balanced world, but they are also creating additional, similarly minded investors who are empowered by newfound access.

It’s this demand that drove our desire to create SROI and to offer all investors searching for a sustainable investment solution the ability to access an attractive ESG product. Particularly, one managed by a team at the forefront of sustainable investing for 30 years and with a proprietary research platform that delivers a competitive edge through insights above and beyond off-the-shelf ESG research.

From a corporate perspective, we recognize that sustainability and ESG-related issues extend not just to our investment activity, but also to how we execute our business model and engage with our community and the world. We have established firm-wide ESG policies which sets forth the people, processes, and formal objectives for researching and expanding participation in

initiatives with sustainability-related organizations. Our Calamos ESG Advisory Council seeks to define our firm-level ESG philosophy, establish firmwide objectives, and execute and monitor progress towards our policy commitments.

**Calamos has been engaged in the communities it serves since the firm was created. Will you highlight Calamos’ commitment to its communities, and do you see this as a responsibility of leading companies?**

Calamos associates and I care about the world we live in. Over the years, we’ve walked in the March of Dimes – March for Babies and American Cancer Society Relay for Life. At the Northern Illinois Food Bank – Calamos headquarters is in Naperville, Illinois – we’ve worked to fight hunger and we’ve collected Toys for Tots, among other activities.

In 2020, we helped raise a grand total of \$1.3 million under the auspices of The Chicago CEO COVID-19 Coalition, a foundation I created to unite local business leaders in a humanitarian campaign for COVID-19 relief and recovery. The Chicago CEO COVID-19 Coalition identifies charities focused on critical themes: personal protective equipment (e.g., gloves, masks), food insecurity, homelessness, community and mental health, and families of law enforcement. 100 percent of Calamos Investments associates contributed to this campaign and all employee donations were 100 percent matched by the company.

Calamos is also extremely active in the veteran community. Our Founder, John P. Calamos, Sr., served in the Vietnam War, and we contribute to veteran-focused charities. I personally sit on the Advisory Board for The SEAL Future Foundation – a mission that provides Navy SEALs the support they need to continue their life of service in their communities. Calamos has a large veteran associate base, and we take active steps to expand and celebrate our veteran associates.

As a Greek American, I work to preserve the heritage of my ancestors and the future prosperity of Greece, serving as founding board member of The Hellenic Initiative – a global nonprofit organization that brings together Diaspora Greeks and Philhellenes to invest in the future of Greece through programs focused on crisis relief, entrepreneurship, and economic development.

**What do you feel are the keys to effective leadership and how do you describe your management style?**

I believe there are qualities that most leaders need to demonstrate, regardless of nature or nurture, whether they are instinctive or are developed over time. Hopefully, I share them. One is resilience – the ability to deal with uncertainty and disruption, and to seize the opportunities that come with constant change. Particularly now, in this time of uncertainty and confronting the prospect of a possible future recession, it is absolutely critical to be able to pivot for the benefit of your enterprise.

Another is a mindset of innovation – to be open and look for new and better practices and procedures. Throughout the history of business, there have been numerous examples of legacy companies and iconic brands that failed to see change coming and to adapt.

Listening is also a key factor to my success. I believe that paying attention to what your clients and your employees are saying is imperative to be able to achieve success.

Finally, leaders need to be passionate in their pursuit of excellence and to demonstrate it in a way that serves as an inspiration to their organization.

**What has made the investment industry so special for you and what do you tell young people about the type of career that the industry offers?**

The financial markets are endlessly fascinating, which is as true for me today as it was when I started on Wall Street 35+ years ago. Many young people have never seen market conditions as they are now, and inflation has been a phenomenon for several generations. I would encourage young people interested in finance to begin to learn about the markets, economic policy and how they work. Start to read business and financial media on a regular basis. Maybe select a company or two and look at their earnings announcements. Pay attention to news about the Federal Reserve and the impact of interest rates and monetary policy.

My general advice to young people, whether their choice is a career in finance or another industry, is to make sure to do what you love. Work toward realizing your dreams and passions, and the rest will follow. ●