

Maine State Innovation Exchange

FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

January 2019

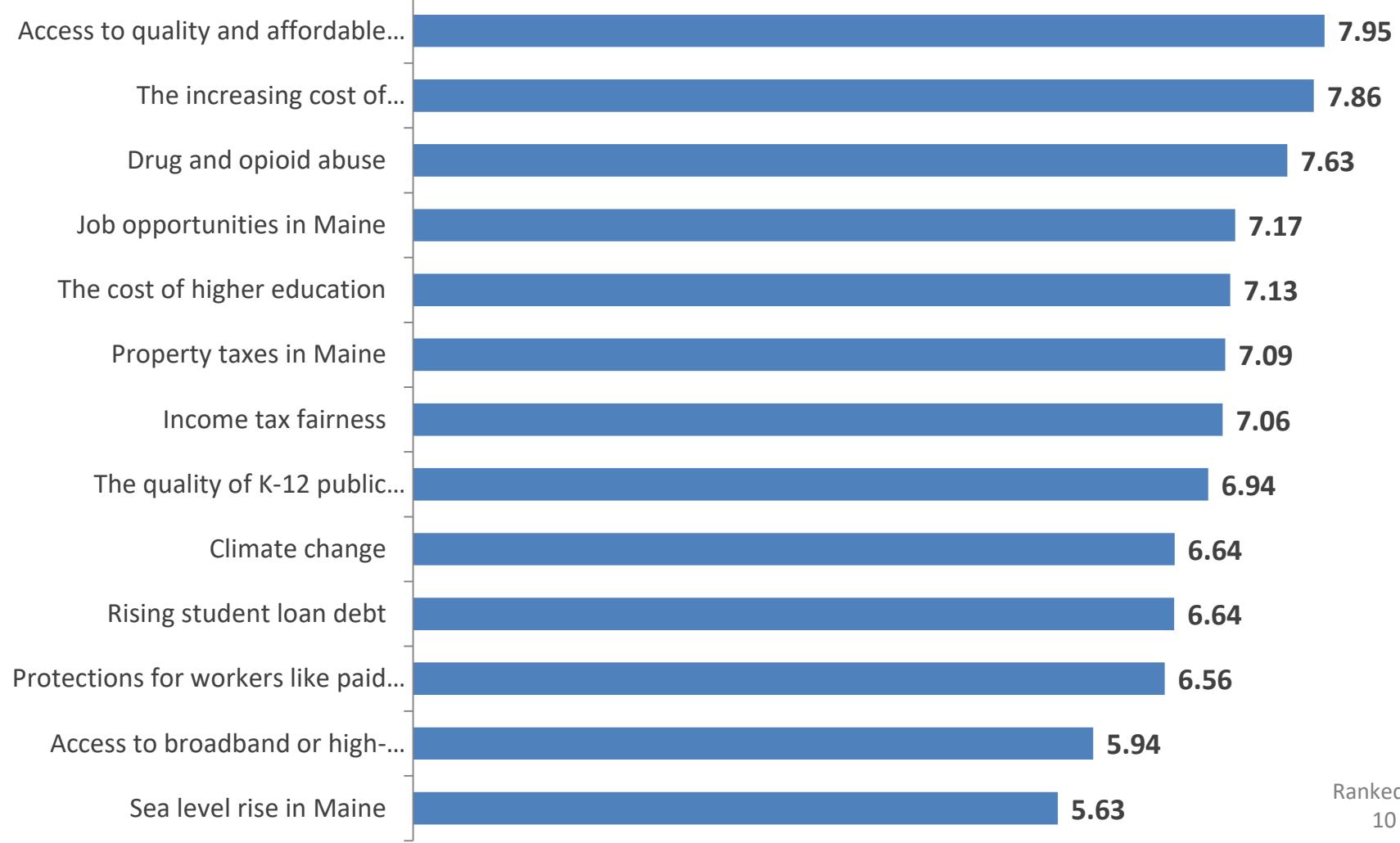
METHODOLOGY

- Lincoln Park Strategies conducted a focus group among swing voters in both Lewiston and Saco. In Lewiston, the group was made up of non-college voters (mixed gender), and in Saco the group was women aged 55 and older.
- Swing voters were identified using a screener, eliminating voters who had strong and consistent partisan views.
- The focus groups built off the results of polling conducted at the end of the 2019 legislative session.

POLLING RECAP

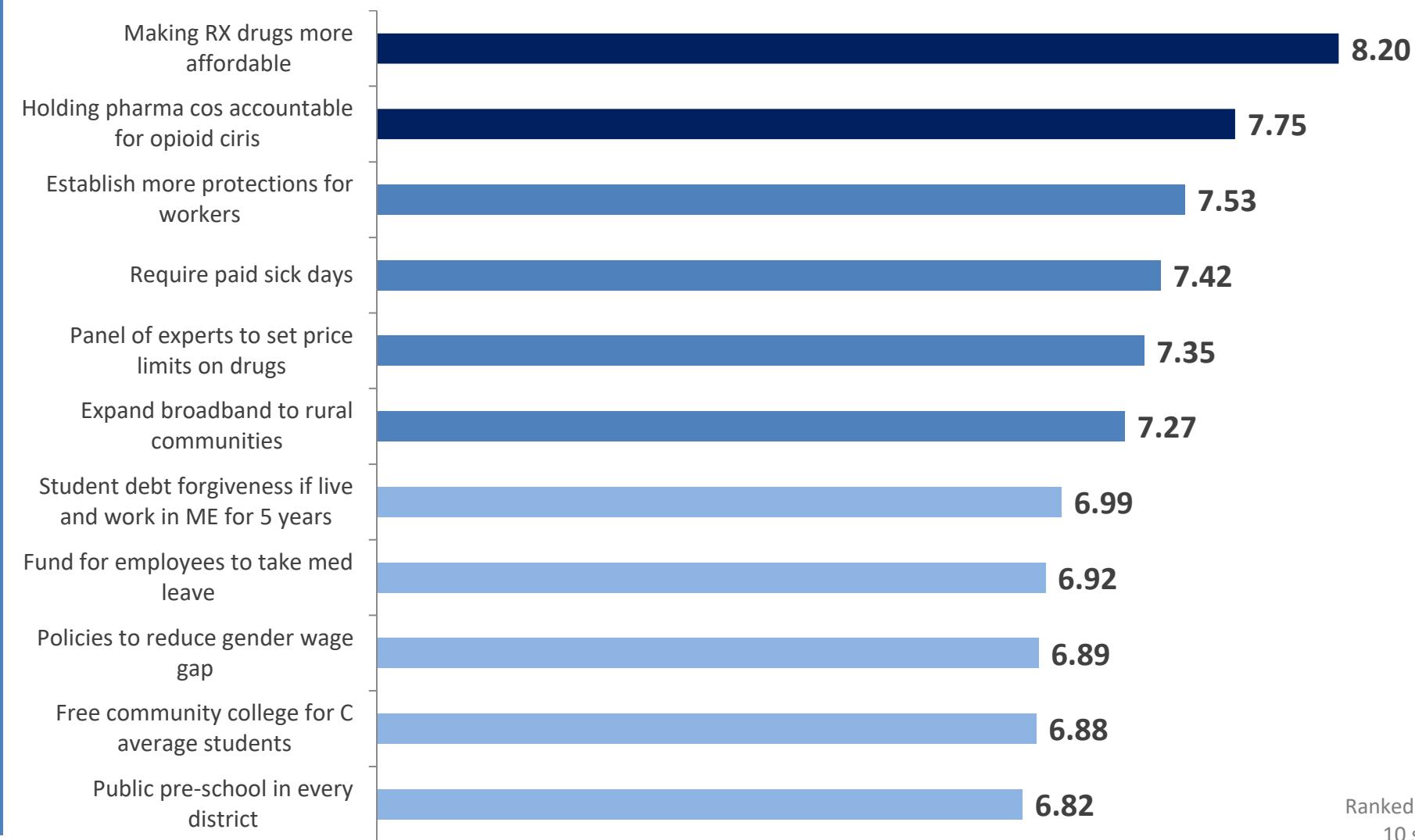
POLLING RESULTS: ISSUES FACING MAINE

- Mainers are most worried about issues around healthcare, especially access to quality and affordable care, the cost of prescription drugs, and opioid abuse.
- Voters are also very worried about job opportunities in the state, the cost of higher education, property taxes, income tax fairness, access to quality education, and climate change.
- While many have concerns, Mainers overall are less concerned about student loan debt, protections for workers, access to broadband, or sea level rise.



- Mainers strongly supported many of the policies the state legislature has recently passed or considered with residents most supportive of legislation to make prescription drugs more affordable, ones that will hold pharmaceutical companies accountable for the opioid crisis, and establishing more protections for workers. Each of the top three received strong support across demographic groups. Requiring paid sick days, establishing a panel of experts to set price limits on drugs, expanding broadband to rural communities, and adjusting the income tax brackets are also in the top tier of strongly supported policies.
- A majority of Mainers also strongly support establishing a fund for medical leave, reducing the gender wage gap, and free community college for C average students. Kennebec residents are less likely to support student debt forgiveness. Northern residents are least supportive of a fund for medical leave and reducing the gender wage gap.

POLLING RESULTS: POLICY PRIORITIES



Q16-29. Now I am going to read a few proposals that people have made about issues here in Maine. Please rate each idea on a scale of 0 to 10, where a 10 means strongly support the proposal, and a 0 means you do not support the proposal at all. You may use any number between 0 and 10.

FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

FOCUS GROUPS OVERVIEW

Group	Impression of county and state	Supported Policies	Mostly supported policies or need more details	Hesitant Policies
Lewiston non-college voters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Largely negative – polarization coming out of DC is leading them to not trust leaders and want to tune out on local issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public preschool Expanding broadband Student debt forgiveness Cracking down on surprise medical bills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Free community college Making prescription drugs more affordable Drug pricing board 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> State insurance fund so employees can take medical/family leave Requiring employers to allow employees to take paid sick leave
Saco women 55 and older	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Largely pessimistic – blamed the media for the increase in divisiveness Concerned about the two Maines and know that they are doing better than the northern part Need to attract businesses to the state 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public preschool Student debt forgiveness Cracking down on surprise medical bills Making prescription drugs more affordable Holding pharmaceutical companies accountable for opioid crisis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requiring employers to allow employees to take paid sick leave State based medical insurance exchange 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Free community college Expanding broadband State insurance fund so employees can take medical/family leave

POLICY SUMMARY

Group	Supported Policies	Mostly supported policies or need more details	Hesitant Policies
Lewiston	Public preschool	Free community college	State insurance fund so employees can take medical/family leave
	Expanding broadband	Making prescription drugs more affordable	Requiring employers to allow employees to take paid sick leave
	Student debt forgiveness	Drug pricing board	
	Cracking down on surprise medical bills		
Saco	Public preschool	Requiring employers to allow employees to take paid sick leave	Free community college
	Student debt forgiveness	State based medical insurance exchange	Expanding broadband
	Holding pharmaceutical companies accountable for opioid crisis		State insurance fund so employees can take medical/family leave
	Cracking down on surprise medical bills		
	Making prescription drugs more affordable		

NON-COLLEGE VOTERS

Lewiston

OVERVIEW

- Participants in Lewiston were largely pessimistic and frustrated with how things are going in the country. What is happening in DC and the increased polarization has led these voters to tune out of everything, including local issues.
- Expanding broadband internet and ensuring all school districts have public preschool were the most popular policies discussed. Participants in Lewiston have experienced the difficulties of unreliable internet and think it is essential that all communities have it. They viewed preschool as essential for children's socialization and not something that families should have to pay for.
- Making higher education more affordable was viewed positively and as a way to keep students in the state/help them get ahead, but there were some hesitations about the cost and lack of motivation some students would have without paying for it.
- Both health care and workers' rights proposals were confusing to voters. When it comes to the cost of health care, Lewiston participants did not trust anyone, even doctors, thinking they are in the pocket of insurance and drug companies. However, they supported the goals of increasing transparency when it comes to health care costs. When it comes to workers' rights, participants were very concerned about the costs to small businesses. While they supported the policies for larger companies, there were many questions about how the policies would scale down to small businesses.
- Participants could not name any leaders in Maine who are fighting for them, citing Angus King when he was governor as the last politician, they could think of, who was doing a good job. While they had vague recollections of what had been done in Augusta in the past year, most were not able to mention anything specific. They felt most representatives in DC are in it for the money. Further into the conversation, they did feel that some of their lawmakers in Augusta do the right thing, but they do not trust many of them.

SOLUTIONS

While most participants supported policies that would make education more affordable, not everyone was fully onboard. Those who were hesitant thought it would cost more than some students would get out of it since most people are motivated more when they have a financial stake in their own education. For others, it was viewed as a way to give Mainers a shot and to keep people in the state.

Student loan debt forgiveness

- *"I think it would keep more people in Maine"*
- *"I think one piece of being helpful, there's got to be more though"*

Making community college free for Mainers if they maintain a C average or better

- *"I think people need to believe in making finances as not a barrier to getting your education. If you want to keep workers here and have good workers in your jobs, that needs to stop being a barrier"*
- *"I think the flow of students going through a free program would be very costly. I think that there will be dedicated students that will look at this as a program yes it's free, but there's going to be an onslaught of kids that flow into the community system without that dedication. And they going to a cost more than what they going to produce"*

SOLUTIONS

Expanding public preschool and broadband to rural communities were viewed universally as a good thing. Participants dove into a long discussion about the importance of preschool and socialization for children and that education for kids should be a right, that they do not need a financial stake in it, unlike for higher education.

Ensuring every school district offers public preschool

- *“preschool is it's key for the development of children. It's absolutely key”*
- *“It's not about how to get those grades. It doesn't matter. It's about getting along and you want your child. If they can get along well with others, that's invaluable”*

Expanding broadband to rural communities

- *“I think it's important because there are still businesses out there and they still need to be able to communicate”*
- *“Senator Jackson just got internet I think is that we're talking about kind of, yeah, he just got internet in the rural areas. That was a mandated thing that he worked hard for. Yeah. So he's the president of the Senate. He just got that and it's true”*
- *“I deal with this almost on a daily basis that we are still the frontier as far as internet goes”*

SOLUTIONS: HEALTH CARE

Mainers in the group were looking for more transparency when it comes to all aspects of health care, however, they did not trust many people to get it done, viewing both doctors and lawmakers as in the pocket of insurance and drug companies.

Making prescription drugs more affordable and increasing transparency in drug pricing

- *"I guess it depends on how you get there, right?"*
- *"More affordable. Does that mean that we're subsidizing?"*

Drug pricing board

- *"There should be something like that"*
- *"Definitely. Somebody has got to regulate this because they're going nuts up there."*

Cracking down on surprise medical bills

- *"I think it goes back to the transparency, though."*

SOLUTIONS

While participants liked the idea of paid sick days and requiring family leave, they were largely concerned about the affect it will have on small businesses in the state. Additionally, these proposals need more explanation for participants.

State insurance fund so employees can take medical or family leave [lots of confusion on how this would work]

- *"that sounds like short-term disability already, which would cover a number of those scenarios."*

Requiring employers to allow their workers to earn paid sick days

- *"I think it's hard when talking about Maine, because like it really feels like there's like four really big businesses or like ten really big businesses. And then the rest of it is really, really small businesses, that you're looking at like, three to twelve people. And if you're looking at that kind of, that small, it isn't, it's never going to be practical to pay a sick day, because you don't have the income from that person generating that work to pay them. Like it's just, if you don't have the money, you don't have the money."*
- Graduated business tax
 - *"I guess it all depends on how it's implemented."*

WOMEN 55+ VOTERS

Saco

OVERVIEW

- Similar to Lewison, participants in Saco were largely pessimistic about how things in the country are going. Participants overwhelmingly blamed the media for increasing divisiveness. Saco voters were mostly satisfied with how things in their area were going, but mentioned many problems that were affecting other areas, particularly those up north.
- A couple participants were aware of recent policies that had been passed including expanding broadband and student debt forgiveness for the STEM fields.
- Participants wanted to see the state do more to attract businesses.
- Student debt forgiveness was viewed as a good idea, particularly as a way to try to keep young people in the state, but some were not sure about free community college since they felt people get more out of something if they have a financial stake. However, others thought it was important to give people who need help a shot at getting ahead.
- Ensuring public preschool was also very popular with participants and most understood the importance of preschool for a child's development. However, unlike in Lewiston, some voters were hesitant on expanding broadband. Those who supported broadband expansion believe it puts people without it at a disadvantage, but others were concerned about how it would be paid for, even though the goal was noble.
- Participants were very interested in policies that would increase transparency in various aspects of health care as well as holding pharmaceutical companies accountable for the opioid crisis. Many were even open to the idea of a state-based medical insurance exchange.
- Policies to help workers take sick time or family leave were met with skepticism from many participants. Some thought these policies could easily be abused, others were concerned about how it work for small businesses and those who have jobs that do not typically get sick time. Additionally, some thought it could prevent businesses from wanting to come to the state.
- While Saco voters supported many of the policies in theory, they were mostly concerned with how they would be paid for.

SOLUTIONS

Similar to Lewiston, most participants supported policies that would make education more affordable, but not everyone was fully onboard. Those who were hesitant thought it would cost more than some students would get out of it since most people are motivated more when they have a financial stake . For others, it was viewed as a way to give Mainers a shot, and as a way to keep people in the state. Student loan debt forgiveness was more popular than making community college free.

Student loan debt forgiveness

- “*we have something like that for the STEM fields, right?*”
- “*I would love to see that. I think that would have people stay in Maine, buy houses, pay taxes, start families, use the schools.*”

Making community college free for Mainers if they maintain a C average or better

- “*people put more into something they're paying for*”
- “*Or some sort of matched funds. You put in a thousand, the state puts in a thousand.*”
- “*... one of the things I think is that they put a lot of burden on a very small segment of people and I think they need to even that burden out*”
- “*This all sounds great to have free tuition, but who's paying for it? Someone has to.*”

SOLUTIONS

Expanding public preschool was viewed universally as a good thing. Participants understand the importance of education at a young age. However, there were mixed views when it came to expanding broadband. Some thought it was important to even the playing field, but others were concerned about how it would be paid for.

Ensuring every school district offers public preschool

- *"I would like to see that."*
- *"What a difference. I'm jealous that mine does now and didn't when my kids my were."*

Expanding broadband to rural communities

- *"How are we going pay for it?"*
- *"But in theory I would like to see it."*
- *"It puts people who don't have that at a real disadvantage."*

SOLUTIONS: HEALTH CARE

Saco voters supported policies that would make health care more transparent from the cost of prescription drugs to surprise medical bills. Additionally, they were interested in a state-based medical insurance exchange.

Making prescription drugs more affordable and increasing transparency in drug pricing

- *"yeah. I think we need to make them more affordable and you know what you're getting."*

Holding pharmaceutical companies accountable for the opioid crisis

- *"Absolutely"*
- *"the opioid manufacturers did know that there were doctors that were ordering way more than the population of their area."*

Cracking down on surprise medical bills

- *"I think there's a bill pending right now in the US"*

State based medical insurance exchange

- *"I think it could work. I mean, it's certainly more, less onerous than a federal one, which is what the Obamacare tried to do federally. I think maybe on a statewide level with... it could probably be doable"*

SOLUTIONS

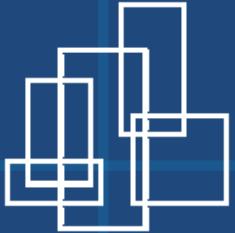
While Saco participants supported the goal of providing medical or family leave and earning paid sick days, they were hesitant on how it could be abused by employees and how it could hurt businesses.

State insurance fund so employees can take medical or family leave [lots of confusion on how this would work]

- *"Medical is one thing, family leave is another...there were people who worked, took two sick days off a year. There were other people who maximize, and they'd be out on short term disability, long term disability. And they just repeatedly year, after year, after year took advantage of it."*

Requiring employers to allow their workers to earn paid sick days

- *"I think that certainly makes Maine more attractive for people to want to come work here. Anything you can do to make Maine attractive for the workers to come in."*
- *"Yes, they have to earn it, I think."*
- *"And what about bartenders and waiters and waitresses? We have a lot of those kinds of jobs in this state. So I don't know."*
- *"Then is that going to detract companies from moving into Maine? Because we all just said we wanted more businesses"*
- *"If you take a small business, maybe eight, 10 people, with a much smaller profit margin. It's going to be a lot harder for them to meet that same threshold."*



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