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September 12 by Isaac Stanley-Becker

# As debate ends, candidates asked to describe lessons from a setback

In the final question of Thursday's debate, the candidates were asked to describe a professional setback, how they recovered and what they learned. Some took liberties with the question, instead choosing to recount a more personal hardship.

Here are their answers.

**Joe Biden** highlighted personal loss, recalling how his wife and daughter died in a car accident in 1972, six weeks after he was elected to the Senate. "I lost my faith for a while," Biden said. He also mentioned the death of his son, Beau, to brain cancer in 2015. He said he recovered by "finding purpose" and devoting himself to public policy.

**Elizabeth Warren** described the difficulties she faced as an expectant mother in the workplace. She said she was dismissed by the principal at the public school where she was teaching. "Here's resilience," she said. "I said, 'I'll go to law school.'"

**Bernie Sanders** chose two difficulties, the first growing up working poor as the son of an immigrant and the second struggling to break into politics. After several unsuccessful bids for office, he became mayor of Burlington, Vt., he said, "with a 10-vote margin."

**Kamala Harris** also highlighted political courage, saying she faced skepticism in each political bid she made. “I was told each time, ‘it can’t be done,’” she said. She ultimately broke racial barriers, she said, drawing on lessons from her mother about perseverance.

**Pete Buttigieg** recounted the difficulty he faced coming out as gay while he was serving as the mayor of South Bend, Ind., which he described as a “socially conservative community.” He feared the move would be “the ultimate career-ending professional setback.” The lesson, he said, was about knowing “what’s worth more to you than winning.”

**Andrew Yang** described hurdles he faced in trying to start a business after he gave up practicing law. He ultimately became a successful entrepreneur, but not before losing scores of investors and a great deal of money. “My parents still told people I was a lawyer,” he quipped.

**Cory Booker** cited his unsuccessful campaign for mayor of Newark, in 2002, when he “took on the political machine,” as he put it. “And boy, did they fight back.” He ran again four years later and won.

**Beto O’Rourke** described the experience of watching his hometown of El Paso become the location of a mass shooting that left 22 people dead in August. O’Rourke, who has made gun control a focal point of his campaign, vowed, “We were not defeated by that, nor were we defined by that.”

**Amy Klobuchar** highlighted personal hardship, first her father’s alcoholism and his difficult decision to seek treatment and then her newborn’s illness that motivated her to advocate for a measure in Minnesota guaranteeing new mothers and their babies 48-hour stays in the hospital.

**Julián Castro** described returning home to San Antonio after law school and facing an ethical dilemma. He was simultaneously working as a lawyer and serving on the San Antonio city council. When his law firm pressed him to vote

for a land deal that he opposed because of insufficient environmental protections, he quit the firm, he said, siding with “the people I was there to represent.”

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September 12 by Amy B Wang

## O'Rourke says he's learned resilience from El Paso

Former congressman Beto O'Rourke gave an emotional response when asked about resilience and his greatest professional setback.

“Everything that I've learned about resilience, I've learned from my hometown of El Paso, Texas,” O'Rourke said, referring to a [mass shooting at a Walmart last month that killed 22 people](#). “The very thing that drew that killer to us is the very thing that helps us set the example for the rest of this country. We don't see our differences as disqualifying or dangerous: We see them as foundational to our success, to our strength and to our security and to our safety.”

O'Rourke said he had just the day before visited the head coach of the [El Paso Fusion, a youth soccer team for 10- and 11-year-old girls](#). That coach, Luis Calvillo, had been shot multiple times, but was still trying to coach the soccer team from his hospital bed.

Another coach on the team was fighting for his life as well. It was those two men and their wives who exemplified resilience, O'Rourke said.

“When we end this scourge of gun violence in this country, when we finally confront the racism that exists in America, when we are defined not by our fears, but instead by our aspirations and our ambitions, it will be in large part, I think,

thanks to the example that El Paso has set,” O’Rourke concluded.

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**10:56 PM**

September 12 by Colby Itkowitz

## Buttigieg discusses risking political career by coming out as gay

Buttigieg, who is openly gay, said he knew his decision to come out while serving as mayor of South Bend, Ind., was potentially going to be “career ending,” but he did it anyway because he “was not interested in not knowing what it was like to be in love any longer.”

“What happened was that I trusted voters to judge me based on the job that I did for them, so they decided to trust me, and reelected me with 80 percent of the vote,” he said.

“And what I learned was that trust can be reciprocated.”

Buttigieg said it’s that trust that is lacking in today’s presidency.

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**10:52 PM**

September 12 by Margaret Sullivan

## PERSPECTIVE: This was the best debate so far (but still pretty painful to watch)

If a debate is judged on how well it serves the voting public, tonight's debate surpassed those in Miami and Detroit in June and July. Those can best be described, respectively, as a hot mess and something slightly cooler than a hot mess.

Houston's was better. Because of the slightly longer response times, the wise decision to eliminate closing statements, and the fact that the field has been winnowed to the strongest candidates, the debate was less chaotic. Candidates had time to develop answers a bit more, and there was less of the incredibly annoying and counterproductive crosstalk that marred the others (especially the first).

Moderators generally did a better job, as Jill Miller Zimon, project director of the Ohio Debate Commission, observed in an email: "Moderators are measured and not making it about them, audience isn't overly boisterous and candidate back-and-forth has occurred mostly organically."

Adding to the success: The final question, which asked candidates about their biggest professional setback, generated thoughtful and engaging (if self-serving) responses. But was anyone still watching? Washington Post columnist Jennifer Rubin expressed this succinctly in a final-hour tweet: "Is anyone whose job doesn't require them to watch this still watching?"

I don't know if this will peg me an easy grader, but I'd give it a solid B.

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10:48 PM

September 12 by Salvador Rizzo

## FACT CHECKER: Warren on the 2013 gun votes

*“We have a Congress that is beholden to the gun industry. And unless we’re willing to address that head-on and roll back the filibuster, we’re not going to get anything done on guns. I was in the United States Senate when 54 senators said let’s do background checks, let’s get rid of assault weapons, and with 54 senators, it failed because of the filibuster.”*

— Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.)

In 2013, after the Sandy Hook massacre, the Senate held separate votes on banning assault weapons and strengthening background checks for gun sales. Warren conflated them.

The bill on background checks got 54 votes, as Warren said during the debate, and fell prey to the filibuster. But the assault weapons ban received 40 votes from Democrats at a time when they held 55 seats in the Senate (counting the independents in their caucus), so the filibuster was not a factor in this case.

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September 12 by Glenn Kessler

## FACT CHECKER: Klobuchar on Trump tariffs

*“One forecast recently says that it [Trump’s tariff war] has already cost us*

*300,000 jobs, all right?"*

— *Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.)*

Klobuchar is referring to [a recent estimate](#) by Moody's Analytics that President Trump's tariffs on Chinese imports has reduced U.S. employment by 300,000. The number reflects jobs eliminated by firms struggling with tariffs and jobs that were not created because of reduced economic activity. Without a change in policy, Moody's said, the job toll will hit 450,000 by the end of 2019 and 900,000 by the end of 2020.

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