

"The curse of can't-do thinking" - Blue Jean Nation

Written by Mike McCabe, Blue Jean Nation

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It's almost as if the unofficial slogan of the U.S. has become No We Can't. Forgotten is how past generations of Americans who had far less than we have today made great progress. But we seem to lack their optimism and boundless faith in America's potential.

ALTOONA - From the time of the nation's founding through the first 180 years of the American experiment, our country's motto was [E pluribus unum](#). In 1956 it was [officially changed](#) to *In God We Trust*

. But as

[more and more Americans grow increasingly pessimistic](#)

about the future — even more pessimistic than

[people in economically underdeveloped countries](#)

— it's almost as if the unofficial slogan of the U.S. has become

No We Can't

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When it is suggested that we should stop sentencing the nation's youth to debt and make education as affordable for our children and grandchildren as past generations made it for us, this aspiration is widely dismissed as a pipe dream. Some bitterly grumble about "free stuff" while many others wonder aloud how we could possibly pay to extend the promise of free public education all the way through college.

Seemingly forgotten is that past generations of Americans created and paid for a system of free public education through high school, and they were far poorer than we are now when they did it. Many who did the paying had no high school diploma of their own at the time, but knew that industrialization meant that many of their kids and grandkids would be leaving the land and heading to factories and offices and would need more education and job training if they were to have a shot at experiencing the American Dream. So they dug deep and provided future generations that shot.

Here's the question for us: Is a high school diploma alone a sure pathway to the American Dream today? Of course not. Then where is the resolve in us that our grandparents and

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great-grandparents had in such abundance? Where in us is their willingness to pay it forward?

When it is suggested that every American should be able to get medical care, this ambition is roundly condemned as pie in the sky. Calls for universal health insurance produce more griping about "free stuff" and many a baseless claim that guaranteeing medical care for everyone would be the mother of all jobs killers.

Forgotten is how past generations of Americans who had far less than we have today made rampant poverty among the nation's elderly a thing of the past by creating and paying for such things as Social Security and Medicare, and these inventions didn't ruin the economy. Didn't even slow it down. The U.S. economic engine roared as never before.

When it is suggested that high-speed Internet and mobile phone service be brought to every doorstep in America, this digital-age necessity is shouted down as an unaffordable extravagance. Still more complaining about "free stuff" ensues.

Forgotten is how past generations of Americans found it within their limited means to pay to bring electricity to every farmhouse and barn in the country. Electric companies never would have taken on the expense of stringing electric wires down every backroad just to pick up a handful of additional customers. Rural electrification took a [decades-long national effort](#) . We all benefit today from that massive undertaking past generations of Americans were willing to support.

Today's telecoms aren't going to lay fiber optic or erect cell towers or mount transmitters in every nook and cranny of the country, just to get a few extra customers. The realization of universal access to high-speed Internet and wireless voice services will again require a sustained national effort.

In so many ways, we have more going for us today than past generations did. We have more money than they had, we are more highly educated than they were, we have far more material possessions, more free time on our hands, not to mention more and better ways to communicate with each other. The one and perhaps only thing they had and we seem to lack is their optimism and boundless faith in America's potential.

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