

PUBLICATION

We Have It Good in America!

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The news is full of chatter about how the United States is falling behind the world; emerging economies are surpassing the United States; and the United States losing its position in the world. That is all bull. We can flush toilets and have access to water. These two apparently simple services, most people take for granted, may not exist in the areas of the world that are allegedly moving to usurp the United States.

I read a [transcript of an interview on NPR](#) with Kate Ascher, author of the new book *The Heights: Anatomy of a Skyscraper*. During the interview, Mr. Ascher mentions that the mixed-use skyscraper Burj Khalifa in Dubai, the world's tallest building at 2,700 feet, is not connected to any sanitary sewer system. Ms. Ascher explained that the wastewater is taken by truck to a processing facility and that the trucks have to wait on line for up to 24 hours before they can unload.

In passing, Ms. Ascher further mentioned that in India many buildings have to provide their own water and their own waste water removal.

I knew India had sanitary problems but I thought that these world-beaters had access to water and sewer. However, none of the major cities in India distribute a constant supply of water to all of its citizens. Further, most Indians rely on on-site sanitation facilities. The level of "on-site sanitation" runs from dumping the waste in the street or in rivers to commercial processing operations. The result is contamination and competition for access to sanitary alternatives.

I realize times are tough especially in construction and it can be tough to find the glass half full; we must then remember that our glass is half full of clean water we just got from the tap.