

When accepting the Republican nomination, Governor Romney treated us to a bit of humor about climate change. “President Obama promised to begin to slow the rise of the oceans and heal the planet,” he said, “My promise is to help you and your family.” No one doubts that families need help, but is the idea of sea level rise really that funny?

The experts don’t think so. Climate change will eat away at America’s coastlines, drowning beaches and wetlands. It will also amplify storm surges, exposing coastal cities to greater risks from hurricanes and other storms. Coastal areas contain a lot of important infrastructure, including many major airports. And sea level rise is not the only risk from climate change. Scientists also expect dramatically worse flooding on rivers. All of this is not to mention the heat waves, droughts, and storms that will beset Americans in the decades to come and that are likely to be far worse in the next century.

Romney is not the first politician to blow off concerns about the future. Maybe his life in private equity encouraged this state of mind — private equity firms have little need to take the long view. Whatever the reason, it is disappointing that he has chosen to write off the future. In his latest comments, he has admitted that climate change is a problem, but he rejects the idea of making any sacrifices whatsoever to deal with it. Leaders necessarily devote much of their energy to the urgent crises of the day, but the best leaders also take a longer view.

It was Louis XV who first said “Après moi le déluge.” As we know, the future was not kind to his legacy. But isn’t that what you would expect of someone who cares only about today and thinks the problems of tomorrow are a joke?