

22 April 2026

Damian Pargas
Executive Director, Roosevelt Institute for American Studies

Sent via email to: da.pargas@roosevelt.nl

Dear Director Pargas:

I am sorry that I did not have the chance to spend more time with you during my recent visit to the Roosevelt Institute for American Studies. I know that you are on paternity leaves and so I am glad that we at least had the chance to meet briefly at the conference on Gender & Conservatism in U.S. History.

This letter constitutes my report on my time as a visiting professor at the RIAS. Let me begin by thanking the RIAS staff. Leontine, Gaetano, and Dario treated me not as a temporary staff member but as a friend. I could not have asked for a warmer welcome. They engaged me in RIAS' work in a way that made a lasting impression, and I have taken with me fond memories of my time with RIAS in Middelburg. It was also wonderful for me to get to know Middelburg. It is charming city that is easy to get around on foot or bike, and easy to leave by bus or train. I do not know whether I will have the chance to return but I would welcome the opportunity if it should arise.

While at RIAS, I spent many full days in the office working on several research projects. These included preliminary work on a book project titled, *Governing in the Public Interest*. The idea for the book was born out of my experience with American water law. American states and countries around the world universally treat water resources as public resources and, many states expressly require governments to manage these resources "in the public interest." Despite this legal requirement, states tend to ignore this legal requirement, and the result has been devastating for many waterways, especially in parts of the arid West. Streams have been entirely dewatered, effectively destroying ecological, recreational, and aesthetic values, which I believe would have been protected if decision-makers faithfully applied the public interest standard. I wrote about this problem in an article published in 2020, but I now recognize that the problem extends beyond water resources and includes many other resources that enjoy public interest protections, such as air resources, public lands, and ecological resources. After leaving RIAS I traveled to London where I had the privilege of presenting my book project at workshops at Cambridge and Oxford. I received helpful feedback at both venues, and I am looking forward to moving ahead with that project.

The other research project that occupied my time at RIAS was a new article I am writing that considers possible strategies for addressing water scarcity in arid regions of the world. The draft article compares the challenges facing two specific river basins – the Colorado River Basin in

North American, which covers seven states and two countries and the Tigris and Euphrates system, in the Middle East, which is primarily located in Turkey, Syria and Iraq. Although their geographic, cultural, and geopolitical situations are vastly different, they face many of the same problems, primarily those associated with declining water supplies due to climate change. I presented my work on this project at a Blue Water Network Graduate Forum event on Water Governance at Leiden University on April 14, 2026. The program was nicely organized by Ylva Axelsson, a first-year student in the History Research Master's program at Leiden University.

I also participated in two workshops that were held at RIAS during my time there. The first was a workshop on teaching existential risk in the Anthropocene on March 26 and 27. Two PhD students, Rob Cullum and Maud Rijks, did a great job organizing this conference, and it led to the production of a draft syllabus for a course on existential risk. I also attended the first day of a second workshop on Gender & Conservatism in U.S. History. While this workshop was outside my areas of expertise it too was well designed and organized by Jeanine Quené, a post-doctoral researcher at RIAS. It offered an interesting forum for discussing a subject that seems to have received little academic attention. I missed the second day of the workshop only because I had made plans to visit Bruges, Belgium and was leaving the morning of that second day.

Finally, I did a podcast with Thomas Brinkman, a second-year student in the History Research Master's program at Leiden University. The podcast covered a wide range of issues related to water resource management in the United States. It focused, in particular, on my thesis that government agencies are failing to manage our public water resources in the public interest.

In the short time that I have been associated with RIAS I have become greatly impressed with its work and very fond of its staff. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to spend time at RIAS and I look forward to hearing more about its success in the future.

Warm regards,



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