

# THE TWENTY-SEVENTH ANNUAL JOE A. CALLAWAY AWARD FOR CIVIC COURAGE

IS HEREBY PRESENTED TO

*Lawrence Criscione*

*Reliability and Risk Engineer,  
Nuclear Regulatory Commission Office of Research -  
Blazing a Courageous Path for Public Health and Safety*

In recognition of his bold release of a Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) report that concluded that there are serious public health and safety risks at nuclear power plants sites throughout the United States; his determination to fight a NRC gag order and communicate with members of Congress about these risks; his challenge to the strong-arm tactics and retaliatory criminal investigation of the Office of Inspector General (OIG); his effort to advance the new anti-gag provisions of the Whistleblower Protection Act and the Lloyd LaFollette Act of 1912; and his resilience when relegated to minimal duties as a result of his efforts to promote public safety.

Mr. Criscione faced retaliation for disclosing a buried 1994 study by Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) engineers that concluded 22 nuclear power plant were structurally inadequate to withstand breaks from upstream dams. The findings of the 1994 report were reaffirmed by the Office of Research, where he works. It concluded that there was a one in 3600 chance that a dam break could cause a meltdown – an exponentially more dangerous level than permitted by nuclear safety requirements. Contrary to normal practice the NRC did not disclose this information to the public or require corrective action at nuclear power plants.

In light of the Fukushima disaster, which had less severe flooding than what would likely occur with a dam break, Mr. Criscione openly shared the report with Congressional oversight committees as it was not a classified document but designated “For Official Use Only”. As a result, the NRC began an investigation of him. OIG investigators threatened him with felony prosecution for releasing secret information. He was advised to resign by his union. He instead remained on the job, with minimal duties, expecting to be indicted at any time.

The Department of Justice decided not to prosecute. But the situation functionally blacklisted him, leaving him trapped in an untenable position. He then filed a complaint with the Office of Special Counsel (OSC) seeking relief under the Whistleblower Protection Enhancement Act that shields whistleblower rights from agency regulations about secrecy, and the Lloyd LaFollette Act that forbids employers from interfering with the rights of individuals to confer with members of Congress.

The OSC ruled in his favor and ordered the NRC to investigate his concerns and take corrective action. This is a significant public victory because since 1994 the public has been vulnerable to a risk of disastrous implications from a nuclear accident that will now, finally, be revealed and can be remedied. For this, Mr. Criscione deserves our gratitude and the support of an alert citizenry.