



## **Bio & Policy Statement from A Nominee for President Board of Governors 2015-2016**



**Neil WESTERN**

**Affiliation: The Wall Street Journal**

The FCC is the envy of journalists around the world. Keeping it that way takes hard work from our committed staff and the many volunteers who serve on the board and our committees. I've been privileged to serve as a governor for the past five years, most recently as your first vice-president. I hope to use the experience I've gained by serving as President in the coming year.

There is much important work to be done: renewing our lease, finalizing changes to our M&A, upholding the quality of our service and events, defending our core values, and making sure we continue to reach out to the wider Hong Kong community. All of this will require a president who is actively engaged and able to bridge differences. I believe in transparent management of the club and that we must continually look for ways to evolve to meet the challenges of the times, whilst strongly protecting the heritage and traditions that define us.

I have worked as a journalist for 25 years, 20 of those based in Hong Kong, as a reporter and editor for newspapers and wires. I am currently Deputy Business Editor for The Wall Street Journal in Asia. Before that, I ran the investigative reporting team at Bloomberg News, recognized for exposing the wealth of China's ruling elite in 2012. Previously, I worked for Agence France-Presse, South China Morning Post, Eastern Express and Hong Kong Standard after starting out as a crime reporter at the Birmingham Post in the U.K. One of the first things I did in the FCC was to start the club's occasional cricket team, where members of all categories bond over beers and post-match post mortems.

For the past three years I have co-convened the membership committee, during which time we have welcomed more than 200 new correspondents and journalists – the lifeblood of the club – through the promotion scheme. We have expanded overall membership slightly to bring in new associate members, ensuring diverse sections of the community are represented within our ranks, as well as aiding the club's financial stability. We also raised corporate joining fees five-fold because it was clear the club was selling itself too cheaply. It's still a great value membership, but the change was also a simple way to increase revenue at a time when we need to think creatively about mitigating against rising costs.

The club must continue to defend press freedom in Hong Kong and Asia, as it has staunchly in the past year. Pressures on the media have ratcheted up in Hong Kong and China, as well as elsewhere. We must also remain a venue that welcomes all sides of the political spectrum to come and speak, as we did on the contentious election proposal that sparked Occupy Central protests. That news story – the biggest local story since at least 1997 – was a reminder of the true value of the FCC: a place to work, debate and also to relax after a long day – or night's - reporting.

I encourage more members to get involved, offer feedback and make constructive

suggestions to make the club as good as it can be. If elected, I hope you will use my email address as a suggestion box to direct any ideas or concerns. You can mail me directly at [neil.western@gmail.com](mailto:neil.western@gmail.com)

Finally, I urge everyone to vote – whoever you vote for -- as the FCC's own democracy is worth supporting. If elected, this would be my sixth year on the board and I would not stand again next year, regardless of whether the current proposal for term limits on the tenure of governors is passed by the membership. I believe all governors should periodically take a break, or move on, to allow fresh blood to infuse new energy and ideas. I have actively encouraged several new members to join the board in recent years, and hopefully we will see more fresh faces elected again this year.