

By: Greg McDonald

Rep. Allen West says President Barack Obama's economic policies have turned the food stamp program into big business, with benefits rising to \$64 billion a year as more Americans have been dumped into poverty.

The Florida congressman, who has been touted as a possible pick for the GOP vice presidential spot this year, told Fox News's Greta Van Susteren Monday night that he blames Obama.

"Since the president has been in office, we've seen a 45 percent increase in food stamp recipients," West said. "So I think when you look at the economic policies, we're going in the wrong direction in that we're growing the amount of people that are being on government subsistence or government dependency instead of getting people off of that with the right type of economic policies to help them to stand up on their own."

West said he was particularly upset at how a "a nutrition assistance program" has become an electronic debit system that allows food stamp recipients to use their government-issued benefit cards at a variety of stores, including fast-food outlets and gas stations.

Calling it a "waste and abuse" of the program, West said, "We've seen an increase in these electronic benefit transfers, these food stamp benefits, go from \$28.6 billion up to over \$64 billion."

Asked what he would do if he were president to change the situation, West offered up the solution that most conservative Republicans tout as their answer to the nation's economic woes — cut taxes and reduce regulations on businesses in an effort to create jobs.

But pressed by Van Susteren to explain how he would help people in despair who are “being left behind” because they can’t find work, West said the answer would still be changes in tax and regulatory policies.

“It’s about the access to capital so that our small community banks can reach out to these small business owners who have an idea so that they can hire Americans,” he said.

West also said it was also time “to get away from” providing Americans with nearly two years of unemployment benefits, depending on their situations. He suggested a cap of 79 weeks maximum.

“We are doing everything that’s counterproductive to the American citizenry getting out there and getting a good, hard-working job,” West insisted. “And we’re actually providing more in benefits to people who are sitting around getting a government subsistence check than for the average disposable income of hardworking American taxpayers.”

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