Ceci does little to quell fears of D-word

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Alberta’s $10.8-billion deficit isn’t going anywhere soon.

In the lead-up to Thursday’s release of Budget 2017, Finance Minister Joe Ceci said Tuesday his government will continue to act as a shock absorber — taking the hit in the short term for long-term benefit.

Ceci said being that shock absorber means not throwing programs and services out the window.

“We’re going to invest in the things necessary, and doing that means we need to run a deficit.”

Since the government was hardly going to find a sudden $10-billion windfall, the D-word shouldn’t come as a surprise to anyone.

But Ceci said Thursday’s budget will contain plans for how the government will curb both the deficit and spending.

It will be much like Budget 2016, Ceci said, with measures to make life more affordable for families (think Bill 1, which reduces school fees by 25 per cent).

And, much like last year, Ceci eschewed that curiously Canadian tradition of new Budget Day shoes.

Instead, Yusuf Moalim Ahmed, 11, received a shiny new pair of soccer boots from the finance minister, symbolic of the budget’s theme of affordability for families.

Ceci said the budget will also address jobs and diversification, likely similar to the investments in petrochemicals and agrifood which he said will “bear more and more fruit going forward” as the economy begins its expected slow recovery.

What Albertans won’t see Thursday is an increase in liquor tax or a provincial sales tax.

The Wildrose will put forward a series of recommendations about where the government could trim spending and rejig resources to deal with the deficit.

“It’s time to change direction, to change course,” party leader Brian Jean said.

The Progressive Conservatives launched an alternative fiscal plan Tuesday.

Interim leader Ric McIver said it would see Alberta return to a surplus by 2019-20 without any cuts to frontline services, although Ceci questioned the figures used by the PCs.

McIver accused the NDP of “killing hope” and expects bad news on budget day.

“I think you’ll see them spending their brains out and borrowing their brains out, and putting Alberta in a bigger hole than we were in before,” he said.

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