

Health boost in British budget update as election looms

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British finance minister George Osborne said Sunday that his pre-election budget update this week will contain a financial boost for the state-run National Health Service.

The so-called autumn statement, to be delivered to parliament on Wednesday, will contain his latest taxation and spending plans.

It is widely expected to lay the groundwork for Osborne's final annual [budget](#), likely to be in March, before the general election due in May 2015.

The opposition Labour Party wants to make the NHS the key battleground at the election.

Prime Minister David Cameron's Conservatives, Osborne included, claim there can only be a strong NHS if the economy is strong as they seek to boost their credentials on handling the nation's finances.

"On Wednesday I will confirm that we will invest an extra £2 billion (\$3.1 billion, 2.5 billion euros) next year in our front-line NHS across the UK," Chancellor of the Exchequer Osborne wrote in The Sun newspaper.

"We want Britain to be ahead of others in preparing for a society where people live longer, so this is the best country in the world to grow old in.

"It's because our economy is growing, and we've kept tight control on the finances, that we can do more for the NHS," he added.

Despite spending cuts since Cameron took office in 2010, Britain is still running a hefty [budget deficit](#) that is adding to its debt pile.

Speaking on BBC television, Osborne claimed he would resist the temptation to throw pre-election sweeteners to voters.

"What you're going to see on Wednesday is how we stay on the course to prosperity, how we boost business, back aspiration," he said, starting with big infrastructure plans to be trailed Monday that should boost the northern English cities.

"What you're also going to see is me avoiding the mistakes of the Labour chancellors before elections with unfunded giveaways that lead to economic problems after the elections."

Paul Johnson, of the Institute for Fiscal Studies think-tank, said Osborne will have to admit on Wednesday that the public finances are in worse shape than was forecast at the last full budget in March.

"Earnings growth has been relatively poor, other tax receipts have been relatively poor. We'll probably end up with the deficit a bit higher," he told BBC television.

"By 2018 we are looking at spending cuts of one-third in a whole slew of public services," he added.

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