

\$3.14B more

Govt, Opposition clash as Parliament debates major supplementary





Diego Martin North-East MP Colm Imbert makes his way to the Red House to attend the Standing Finance Committee Meeting in Parliament yesterday. PHOTO BY KERWIN PIERRE



Minister of Finance Dave Tancoo speaks during the Standing Finance Committee Meeting in Parliament yesterday. PHOTO COURTESY OFFICE OF THE PARLIAMENT

GAIL ALEXANDER SENIOR POLITICAL REPORTER

The United National Congress (UNC) Government has supplemented the 2025 Budget of \$58.9 billion with a total of \$3.14 billion more for 28 ministries and divisions after the past People's National Movement (PNM) government's "fiscal financial recklessness," says Finance Minister Dave Tancoo.

However, Opposition PNM MP Colm Imbert yesterday said certain supplemental funding for the Parliament—including \$13.7 million for the payment of salaries and arrears stemming from the 120th Salaries Review Commission's (SRC) report, is for backpay for UNC MPs of the previous Parliament.

And Opposition PNM whip Marvin Gonzales revealed that \$750,000 was spent on the May 23 ceremonial opening of the 13th Parliament's term under the new UNC Government.

Imbert and Gonzales grilled Tancoo on the issues at yesterday's Standing Finance Committee's (SFC) stormy deliberations in Parliament.

Approval was given for a total of \$3.14 billion in supplemental funding for the 28 ministries and divisions.

The supplemental funding of \$3,143,983,761 increases the 2025 Budget of \$58.9 billion. The additional funding will take the various divisions over the next three months to the end of the 2025 fiscal year in September.

The Health Ministry received the highest supplemental funding—\$728.5 million. The funding was discussed ahead of tomorrow's mid-year review of the 2025 Budget.

During his contribution, Tancoo said the \$3.14 billion supplementation was "...due to the fiscal financial recklessness and free-for-all undertaken by the former government, where we were spending money without planning or making proper payment arrangements."

"As a result, we've had a crash of the economy. Thanks to us now being in Government, we have access to the information.

A lot more will be said in the mid-year review on Wednesday, when we'll be able to show how this former government crashed the economy and the effect it would have had on ministries and the public."

Imbert, Tancoo clash on \$ for UNC MPs

Tancoo said the Parliament received total supplemental funding of \$27,988,000.

He added, "It was required to meet unanticipated costs, being the payment of arrears of salary owed to holders of public offices arising from the implementation of the 120th Salaries Review Commission, as well as for expenses to be incurred under an array of items listed under goods and services."

Imbert asked Tancoo about an item in the listing of various funds for Parliament – involving \$13,699,200—and whether Tancoo was saying he was unaware that item was backpay for Opposition UNC MPs as a result of the SRC report.

"Is the minister saying he's not aware this item is to pay him and his colleagues backpay arising from SRC's report?" Imbert added.

Tancoo said, "The 120th report of the SRC was brought by the PNM government and approved in Parliament by the PNM government. That (PNM) side is very well aware that this to deal with several classes of individuals—it's not for payments of the Opposition. It's for payments of Members of Parliament, including yourselves, and this was brought by the PNM government!"

Imbert responded, "That statement is incorrect.

We're dealing with the Parliament, we're dealing with Head 05, item 001, subitem 01. This has nothing to do with persons who are on this side at this point in time. This deals with Members of Parliament in the previous Parliament and is the minister saying he's unaware this item is for him to get backpay!"

Tancoo urged PNM MPs to read the explanatory notes accompanying the supplemental funding, stating, "The purpose of this is to honour the payment of arrears of salaries as per the 120th report of the Salaries Review Commission, as well as for increased monthly payments. The arrears of salaries have been audited and have been scheduled for payment.' The arrears of salaries are due to

Members of Parliament – including the Member opposite ...”

“No way! That’s not true,” Imbert interjected.

Tancoo continued, “Senators, Members of the House, deputy Speakers, Leader of the Opposition, President of the Senate, vice President of the Senate, Clerk of the House, Clerk of the Senate, Ombudsman, executive officer to the Ombudsman, Head of Legal and State Counsel 1...”

Imbert asked if Tancoo was unaware that the matter was only for former UNC Opposition MPs, “and doesn’t include any payment for MPs on this (PNM) side, is he unaware of this fact, because he keeps saying it’s for people on this (PNM) side which I know isn’t true. So, is he unaware this is for his backpay and his UNC colleagues in the former House of Representatives?”

Tancoo repeated his listing of the offices carried in the explanatory notes.

PNM MP Dr Nyan Gadsby-Dolly requested a breakdown of how much of the \$13.7m is to be used to pay MPs the arrears in the different categories listed.

Tancoo said the request will be considered, though factors were involved, especially when information needs to be” tabulated.”

Gadsby-Dolly asked if there’s going to be a request made by the Parliament for the information within a specific timeframe.

PNM MP Stuart Young said Parliament’s Standing Order allows members to seek clarification from relevant accounting officers and it is incumbent upon them to provide information requested.

\$750,000 launch of Parliament term

PNM’s Gonzales also noted a line item on the documents pertaining to hosting of conferences, seminars and other functions.

He said he saw an increase in the allocation by \$750,000 and he was advised that \$750,000 was for the May 23 ceremonial opening of Parliament. That followed the UNC Government’s April 28 General Election win.

“Can the minister give some information with respect to the service providers that would have accounted for \$750,000 for the ceremonial opening of the Parliament?”Gonzales added.

Tancoo didn’t have that at hand and offered it in writing in due course. Gonzales asked if that would be by tomorrow’s midyear review, to which Tancoo said he’d try his best.

Imbert asked for a breakdown of the \$750,000 spent on the Parliament launch.