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# Farrakhan says Obama draws a 'oneness of spirit'

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CHICAGO -- After months of silence about his support for Barack Obama, Nation of Islam Minister Louis Farrakhan said in an address Sunday that the new president-elect has a God-given capacity to handle any burdens he'll face as the nation's leader.

Farrakhan added that Obama will be able to make positive changes only with help from "God and people of goodwill," and he urged followers of the Chicago-based black nationalist movement to do their part.

"President-elect Obama has energized all segments of the depressed, downtrodden, rejected and despised," he said in a 90-minute speech at Mosque Maryam on the city's South Side. "Now it is up to us to take the new energy that he has given us ... and channel that energy into making ourselves better."

Dressed in intricately decorated red and gold robes and a matching fez, the once-ailing 75-year-old leader spoke to more than 1,000 followers in an address called "America's New Beginning: President-elect Barack Obama."

Farrakhan, who said Obama draws a "oneness of spirit" from all people, admitted he stayed quiet about his support for Obama during the past few months out of fear his words would harm the Illinois senator's bid for the White House.

In February, Farrakhan praised Obama, calling him "the hope of the entire world that America will change and be made better" at a Saviours' Day event in Chicago.

But Obama quickly distanced himself from Farrakhan, denouncing the minister's support during a presidential debate with then-Democratic rival Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton. Obama said he objected to Farrakhan's past statements about Judaism, which many have considered anti-Semitic. Nation of Islam officials have said Farrakhan's comments are often taken out of context.

On Sunday, Farrakhan said Obama faced unfair scrutiny for his associations with the Rev. Jeremiah Wright, Obama's former pastor, who was shown making fiery statements about the U.S. government in widely circulated video clips. Obama was also criticized because of the Rev. Michael Pfleger, a Chicago priest who mocked Clinton at Wright and Obama's former church, Trinity United

Church of Christ.

"For nine months, I kept quiet because I saw that the good words that I spoke about this beautiful young man at our Saviours' Day convention and the way they were misused," Farrakhan said of Obama. "I decided it would be better for me to just be quiet rather than be drawn into the controversy that was swirling around his pastor, Father Pfleger, and others."

Farrakhan then added with a smile, "I feel freer today to say the things that are in my heart."

He thanked black leaders including the Revs. Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton, for laying the foundation for Obama's victory, which he called Divine.

The Nation of Islam has espoused black nationalism and self-reliance since it was founded in the 1930s, but has reached out more lately to other groups, including immigrants.

Farrakhan has haltingly tried to move the Nation toward traditional Islam, which considers the American movement heretical.

He has also downplayed some of the group's more controversial beliefs. The Nation of Islam has taught that whites are descended from the devil and that blacks are the chosen people of Allah.

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