



President Barack Obama nominated Eric Fanning to be the next secretary of the Army, the White House said Friday, paving the way for the first openly gay leader of a military branch in U.S. history.

Fanning is currently serving as acting Army undersecretary and previously worked as an Air Force undersecretary and a chief of staff to Defense Secretary Ash Carter. His nomination to the post must be confirmed by the Senate.

"Eric brings many years of proven experience and exceptional leadership to this new role," Obama said in a statement. "I am confident he will help lead America's soldiers with distinction."

Advocacy groups said the nomination of an openly gay man to lead a U.S. service branch was a significant sign of progress in protecting the rights of LGBT individuals serving in the world's most powerful military.

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