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WASHINGTON — Myron E. “Mike” Ullman 3rd, chairman and chief executive officer of J.C. Penney Co. Inc., has resigned his seat on the board of the National Retail Federation and will not renew the company’s membership with the trade and lobbying group.

Ullman, a recent chairman of NRF, sent a letter Wednesday to current chairman Terry J. Lundgren, who is also president and ceo of Macy’s Inc., to tell him of the decision, according to Tracy Mullin, president and ceo of NRF. Penney’s membership with NRF expires on April 1.

A Penney’s spokesman said nine of 10 of the largest retailers, including Penney’s, are represented on the board of the Retail Industry Leaders Association and “given the gravity of all of the issues facing large employers, specifically in the retail industry, we made the decision to focus all of our industry advocacy through RILA.”

RILA and the NRF called off a merger last June after announcing they were combining their groups in April, but declined to provide details. Ullman also sits on the RILA board.

“It appears that he [Ullman] is really more interested in working with big box companies,” said Mullin, referring to RILA, the other key retail trade and lobbying group in Washington. “Clearly he feels a greater affinity there than here. That is the conclusion I draw from this.”

RILA represents 200 members, including most major discounters and mass merchants such as Wal-Mart Stores Inc., Home Depot Inc., Best Buy Co. and Target Corp. The NRF includes 2,500 members such as Macy’s Inc., J. Crew Group, Levis Strauss & Co., Limited Brands Inc., Liz Claiborne Inc., and Neiman Marcus Inc.

Mullin speculated it was likely that Ullman, whom she called the “architect” of the merger, resigned from the NRF in part because of its failure to be completed.

“I have been a proponent of one industry association as long as I’ve been in the industry,” said Mullin. “The whole idea of a merger between RILA and NRF makes perfect sense, but for me the issue [leading to the break down in talks] was how it was managed. I think there was too much of a rush and the process was truncated, and a lot of people didn’t have the opportunity to weigh in.”

Mullin said she believes a merger will ultimately take place “down the road.”