Senator Bennett examines the coin presented by NFB of Utah President Ron Gardner and Sachin Pavithran, Utah's NFB legislative coordinator and an employee of the CPD.

Earlier this month, Senator Bob Bennett received a coin honoring Louis Braille from two Utah representatives of the National Federation of the Blind. One of the presenters was Sachin Pavithran, Utah's NFB legislative coordinator and also an assistive technology specialist at the Center for Persons with Disabilities at Utah State University.

In an interview, Pavithran reflected on the story behind the coin and the “Braille Readers are Leaders” literacy campaign that it will help fund. Louis Braille invented the tactile reading and writing system that bears his name. Unfortunately, many people with visual disabilities are unable to use that system.

“There's a big struggle in the nation for blind people getting their training to read Braille,” Pavithran said. “People say technology is getting better, so people don't need to read Braille.”

In the sighted world, educators would never accept that technology could replace reading. Still, the NFB reports that only 10 percent of children who are blind learn Braille in school, despite the fact that Braille reading is associated with better grades, employment and higher income. Eighty percent of all employed people who are blind are fluent Braille readers and writers.

The coin will help raise awareness about the writing system, and also raise funds to give more people the opportunity to learn it. The Louis Braille Bicentennial Silver Dollar will not circulate, but people who buy it as a collectors' item will help fund programs to teach Braille to people with visual disabilities. Pavithran said $10 of each coin purchase will be used by NFB to raise awareness and boost training in Braille.

The coin sells for $31.95 or $37.95, depending on how it is displayed.

Pavithran was one of a team of NFB members from Utah who worked with Senator Bennett on the legislation that allowed the coin to be minted. The senator was a champion of the coin, which includes a readable Braille inscription.