Wheels: A letter from Dennis states, “My wife (Jacki) owns a 2002 Nissan Altima 2.5S with 42,900 miles, which she bought in September of 2002. Last December on a very frosty Ohio morning, Jacki went out to warm up her car before work. It cranked and cranked but would not start. We had it towed to an independent shop. I suggested to the technician that it seemed like fuel line freeze up, but he informed me that was unlikely due to the additives in the gasoline these days. $160 later, I brought the car home. They had decarboned the injectors or some such thing. I should mention that prior to the towing, the car would just turn off driving down the street. Jacki had the where with all to slip it into neutral and restart the car. This happened two times leading up to the towing. The car continued cutting out when the engine was warm and cold at speeds anywhere from 15 to 40 mph. I decided to check for recalls on this car and found there were six; two dealing with fuel related issues. We had the recall work completed. Since then, Jacki has experienced the car lunging or jerking in her words, at highway speeds nonetheless. The dealer service manager says unless the car repeats this problem for him he hasn't a clue what could be the problem. The 40-minute trip to the dealer isn't exactly convenient for an out of warranty car. Any thoughts or ideas would be appreciated.”

Halderman: The stalling and the no-start could have the same cause. There are several possible causes to this problem, yet no where in your letter did you mention that any preventative service work has been done. For example, if the fuel filter is partially clogged, this could be the cause, as well as an ignition system problem. When any engine is cold, it requires more fuel to start and run properly so a restriction or a weak fuel pump would most likely show up when cold. Even worn spark plugs could be the cause. If this were my vehicle, I would start with the basics and perform a maintenance tune-up including new spark plugs, spark plug wires, distributor cap, rotor (if equipped), plus a new air filter, and fuel filter. Then if the problem continues, I would suggest that you find a shop or dealer who will perform a thorough diagnosis, including fuel pressure and volume checks, as well as fuel injector and fuel injection system diagnosis.